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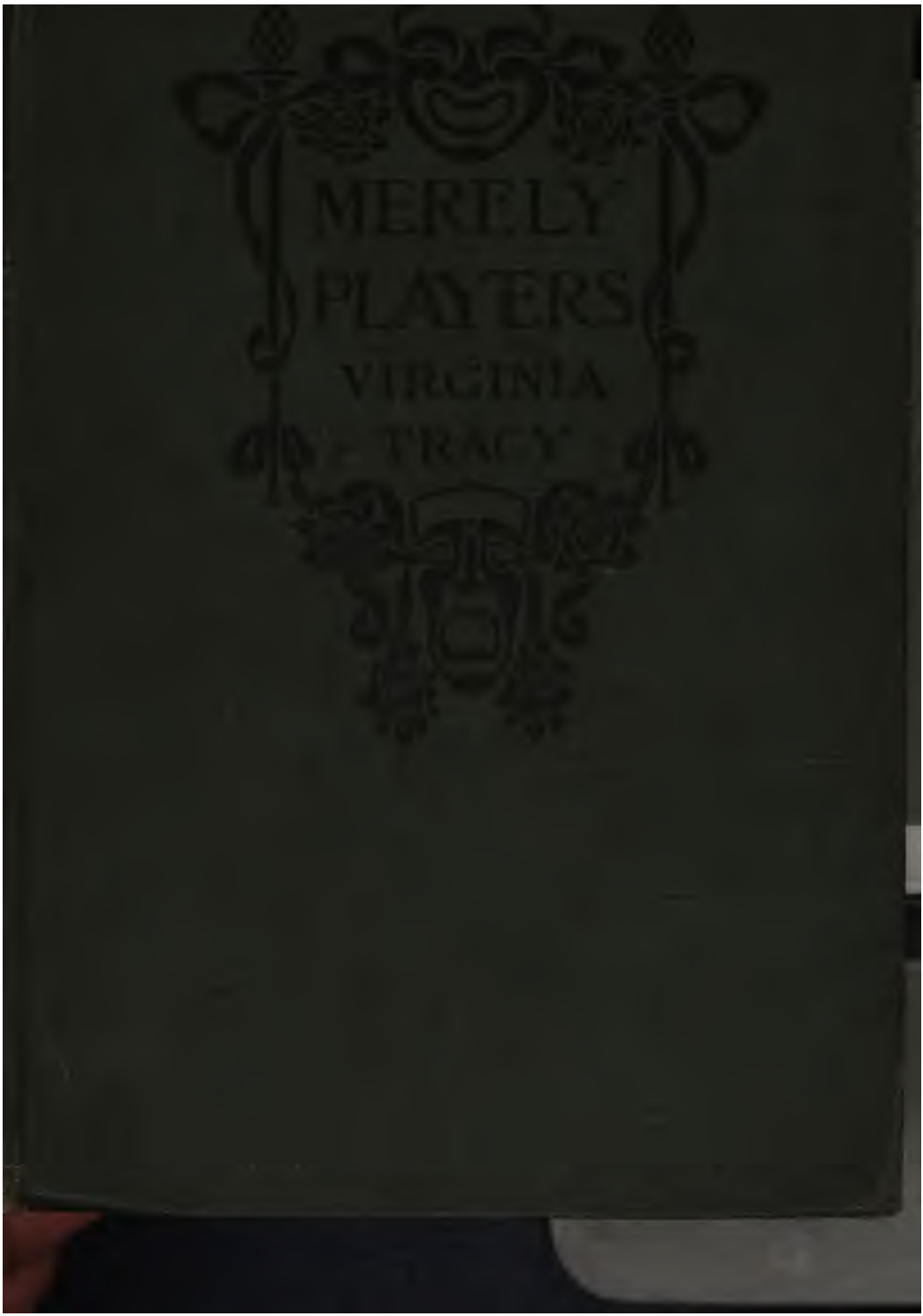
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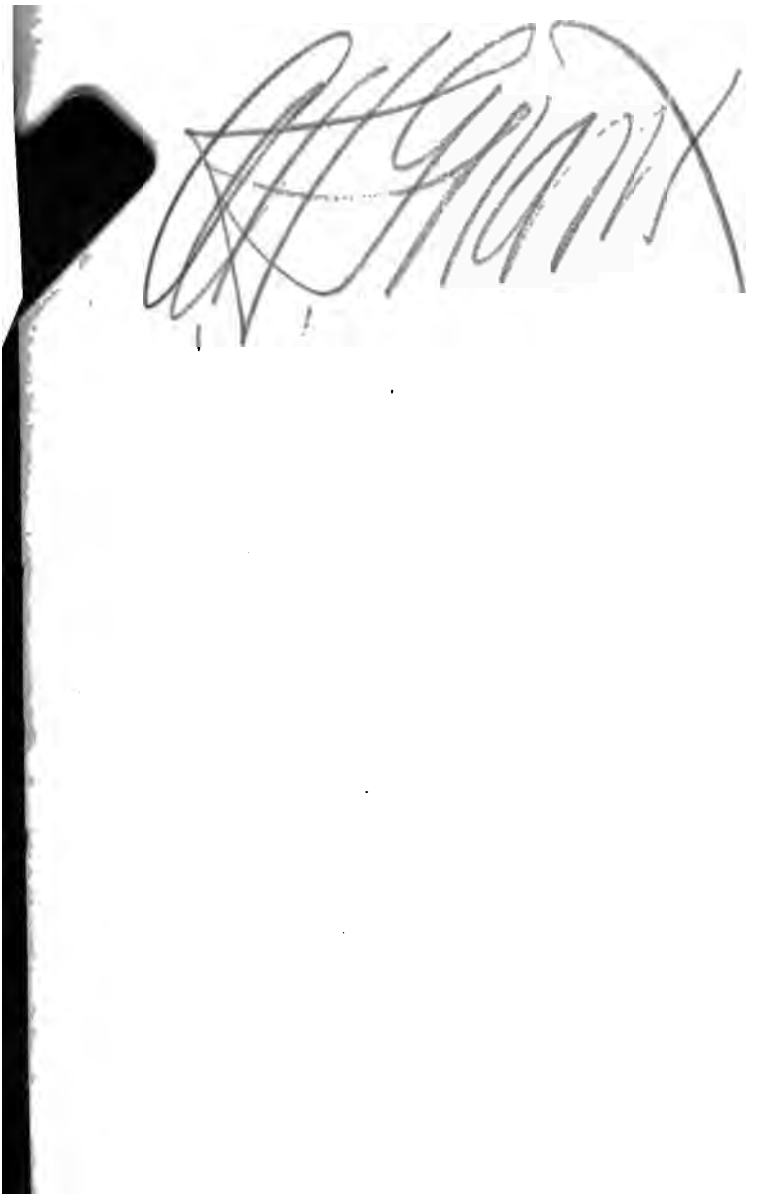

MERELY PLAYERS

MERELY PLAYERS

STORIES OF STAGE LIFE

BY

VIRGINIA TRACY

NEW YORK
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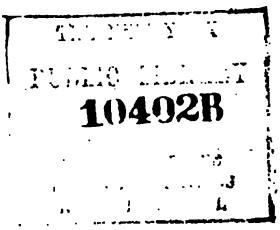
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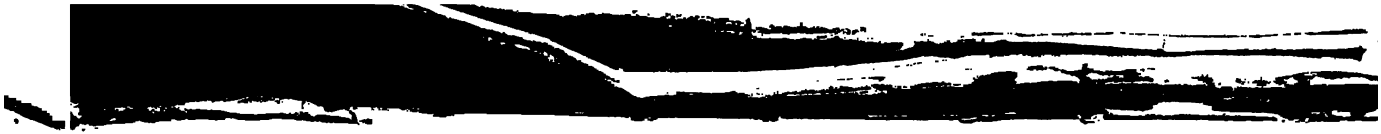

The players come, the players go,
Out of the shadows they advance
To meet the laughter and the dance,
The light, the song, the happy chance
Of hero's death or prince's woe;
They have their moment to entrance,
To lose the world or catch its glance,
Then they are gone; the lights sink low,
And to all you who cheered them so
They still are nothing but a show.

This is the humble voice and small
Of one who sat behind the scene,
Who saw the rough woof of the screen,—
Pierrot in tears, the discrowned queen,
The hopes that faint by the high wall,
The luck that leaps it, unforeseen,
The common jays that kiss between
The tragic, tired shadows tall;—
Who yet, at every curtain's fall
Said to her heart, *"I loved it—all!"*

MERELY PLAYERS

MERELY PLAYERS

THE LOTUS EATERS

"AND leaves me to starve," said Estella, cutting off a leg of the chicken and throwing it to the nearest dog. "Leaves me to starve in the gutter and leaves Regina, his own flesh and blood—look at that child, Kate, look at her! What sort of a brute could desert a child like that? Was her mother's comfort, yes, she was!—leaves Regina without a rag to her back." She absent-mindedly put a piece of chicken into her mouth and leaned her elbows on the table.

"I really don't know what we shall do about the rent," said Mrs. Donnelly. "When he came for it this morning he told Barbara he'd be back this afternoon, and it's a hot day for anybody to be out, let alone a fat fellow like him. You can't put off the landlord himself like you can an agent, anyway. I could pay ten dollars on account next Saturday night. If he won't take that, or your alimony doesn't come, I don't know what will become of us."

"I'm sure I don't know either," said Estella. "It seems such a nuisance to move. Speak for it then?"—"Woof! Woof!" said Dooley, the fatter of the Scotch terriers—"I thought we were going to be so happy here,

too, when we first came. He seemed such a nice, unassuming sort of man."

Tony, who was washing the household linen in the kitchen, put his head through the doorway. It was rather a lordly little black head and belonged to a young fellow of a slender middle height, motions extraordinarily light and free, and blue, humorous, inquisitive, confidential eyes. Said he: "I beg your pardon, Estella, but the big dishpan—has it gone to heaven?"

"It's out on the fire-escape," replied Estella, "with gasoline in it. I put all the old gloves I could find into gasoline this morning, so that if any of us should happen to get an engagement, they'd have clean gloves anyway."

Tony withdrew. He had not looked at Estella, but at Barbara, the Beauty, who sat in the window-sill and continued to look neither at him nor at Estella nor at the riot of the dogs and the chicken-bones and Regina upon the uncarpeted floor, but across the shining roof-tops to the Palisades.

The mistress of this Harlem flat was Mrs. Baker, Estella Cortelyou in stage life. Mr. Baker was divorced. He was a prosperous person and paid a considerable alimony, with which he was not always sufficiently prompt. With Mrs. Baker lived her infant daughter, Regina Rosalys, and her younger sister, Barbara Floyd. Also she had as summer boarders Mr. Anthony Regnault, a young actor who seldom happened to be out of work, Mr. Fred Donnelly, not much older, who seldom happened to be in it, and Mrs. Kate Donnelly, an elderly typewriter, who had married a brother Donnelly, deceased. All the boarders paid far more than their board, when they had it, and nothing at all when they

had not. At the present moment, they had been some time through lunch without having as yet cleared away its remains, and Estella and Mrs. Donnelly, whose employer was away on his own vacation, had been regaling the company with accounts of the Russian coronation, which they read from the newspapers that strewed the room. Fred Donnelly, who was busy pinning the edge of his tie over a spot he had just discovered on his shirt-front, gloomily commented upon Estella's last remark: "I guess it'll be a long enough day before any of us get an engagement!"

"You forget Tony!" said his sister-in-law.

"I ain't ever let to," Fred responded with some savagery. "I—can't you stop gorging on those papers a minute? They're two months old."

"That makes 'em all the lovelier," replied Estella. "Tony threw them off the kitchen shelf this morning, and I felt so good to read it all over again. You feel sure, then, that it's all true."

"Tony's generous with his old newspapers. That's because he's signed for a job. But he don't begin till November. November—Lord! you can't believe there's ever going to be such a month."

"Oh, we may all be working by then," cried Estella in her voice of tragic fire. "You can't tell. You don't suppose we're going to go on like this, do you?"

"Not if we don't pay the rent, we ain't," said Fred. "We'll have fifteen dollars the week after next, Barbara and me, if we pose for those kinetoscope things. But we owe all that now, in little bills."

"That reminds me, Tony," Estella called, "I wish you could get both the tablecloths ironed by to-night, 'cause

you can't do it to-morrow. No; they're going to shut off the gas to-night; we had a notice from 'em yesterday."

"Well, this fellow was just right," declared Mrs. Donnelly, glaring up from her newspaper; "this one that refused to kiss the Czarina's hand. It's a nasty, silly thing to do. They'll never catch me doing it."

"Nor me, I'm afraid," said Tony, reappearing with a bucket that brimmed wet tablecloths. He paused for a moment in the doorway and leaned there, exceedingly comfortable and cool. Indeed, on this midsummer afternoon, when the unshaded dining-room appeared altogether huddled and tousled and hot, there was in the look of this very competent amateur laundryman something so tranquil, so airy and sylvan, that it might have suggested a beneficent gentleman-dryad but for the absurd great pipe which was hanging out of his mouth. "I'll take these up to the roof now, Estella; I've just hung out the smaller pieces. We can't tell but that later Barbara'll help me take them down. But I do hope, Stella Cortelyou, that the next flat we appropriate will have a coal range. If we are to have no fire to iron with to-morrow, how shall we cook?"

"I suppose we'll have to go out to our meals. I've got my wedding-ring yet. He can force me to part with that, Tommy Baker can, but he can't force me to let our child starve."

"That must be very disenchanting for Tommy," Tony answered. "But I think I'll leap out with a chair or two before it comes to our eating up your wedding-ring, Estella."

Regina Rosalys, who was at that moment recuperating

from her wrestling matches with the dogs, said suddenly:

"Anny Bobs gah go ring."

"No, no, darling. Poor Auntie Barbara hasn't got any ring at all. You lost Auntie Barbara's little blue ring down the stationary washstand, don't you remember?"

"No, no, Anny Bobs gah go ring." Regina's fat little hands formed an oblong about the size of a cucumber. "Big," she persisted, nodding.

"She means that Indian bracelet," said Estella. Tony looked anxiously and a little fearfully at Barbara, and forgot to joke. At that moment the door bell rang. Tony leaned back into the kitchen and pressed the little electric button which opened the street door.

"Oh!" cried Estella, "that's the expressman with my money now." She rose and ran into the hall.

There was a waiting silence. Tony continued to lean on the doorway and look at the girl in the window-seat. She had gray eyes of a miraculous, deep clearness, but she kept these turned away in a far-off quiet, profound enough to strike cold upon a suitor's heart. Tony had to content himself with the faint bright color in the oval of her cheeks; the pale rose of her faded and shrunken cotton blouse stopped in a little drawn circle at her throat; the throat itself was very white and regal looking under the piled fairness of Barbara's brown hair. One hand dropped, motionless, against her old gray skirt, and Tony smiled to it wistfully. It was a modest smile, under a trick of audacity. Tony was three-and-twenty, and all women except Barbara had done their best to spoil him,—except Barbara, who had remained silent the summer through before his love. By the community be-

fore which so much of it had, perforce, to be carried on, the love-making was encouragingly ignored, but the community was beginning to get restless, because from the lady it received no confidence. The summer was sunning itself away, and still Barbara rested, whether or not to be wooed, passive, idle, enigmatic, lovely; and still prayerfully, and with deft derision, Tony continued publicly to woo her. Now, though he could not catch her glance, his eyes spoke declarations twenty times a minute, and formally proposed to her. They besought, commanded, laughed at her, adored her. Suddenly, when there seemed least hope, she turned round and looked at him. It was a very steadfast, searching look, and Tony tingled and rejoiced to meet it. He lifted his head happily, with a singular pride, and at the little motion the girl put her hand sharply to her throat and turned away.

"He's a long time coming upstairs," said Fred.

At that moment Estella ran back into the hall of the flat and closed the door with the effect of a subdued cyclone.

"It's not the expressman!" she called, in a shrieking whisper. "The top of his head looks like the milkman, and his bill's due." Tony laughed aloud.

"Tell him to come again," suggested Kate Donnelly, still fortified by immersion in the coronation glories.

"Told him that last time," said Fred.

"Oh, well, maybe he wasn't coming here," said Estella, listening a moment, and continued. "Maybe it was only the janitor, after all. Once before the alimony didn't come, and then it turned out the expressman had brought it two or three times, only the downstairs bell

didn't ring, so to-day I asked the janitor to ring the bell every time he went past, so I'd feel quite easy."

The upstairs bell unkindly rang.

"Ssh!" hissed Estella; "pretend we're out."

"Is he to suppose the downstairs door was opened by a spook?" Tony whispered.

"Well, you needn't talk. You did it." She came back into the dining-room, and sat down with infinite non-rustling precautions. "I'm sure I'd like to pay him as well as anybody. Indeed, nobody has the horror of debt I've got. I tremble with it when I wake in the night. It's born in me, I don't know why. But I can't pay what I haven't got, not if I was to coin my blood for it." The bell rang again. "Well, he can just tire himself out at that," Estella added. "I should think he'd know we'd have opened it before if we'd wanted him."

Tony's eyes overran with laughter. Regina threw herself into Barbara's lap, and Barbara put her face into the black mop of Regina's curls, and began to whisper a story to her.

"I wish I was out of the whole business," muttered Fred: "out of the profession, I mean. I wish I knew another durned thing to do. I had a chance to be a dentist once, but I was too good for it then. When that old aunt of mine in Ireland dies, I bet I take my share of what she leaves and buy an interest in a business. And when you're all down on your luck, you can come to me, people, and I'll help you out."

"My share in that pneumatic tire'll be worth thousands of dollars by then," said Mrs. Donnelly, refolding her newspaper. "They've got a backer for it now who's

going to put it right on the market. Will Knowles says there's a fortune in it, and he's an inventor."

"I was thinking the other day it would be nice to invent something," replied Estella; "but I never get mine finished, somehow."

The enemy without gave a final knock and ring, and departed. He was pursued downstairs by the barks of the terriers and the shrieks of Regina, who at that moment rushed, all three, into each other's arms.

"Look here," said Fred; "are you sure it wasn't Mr. Bates, come for the rent? He told Barbara he'd be here at three o'clock."

"Mercy! Look out of the window, Barbara, and see who it was." Barbara leaned out and down, watching.

"Well, I vow!" said Mrs. Donnelly. "Do you know what those Gostioffs, or whatever their name is, have been doing? The Czar said everybody could make their crowns out of silver-gilt, because some of 'em are as poor as church mice, and those Gostioffs have been over to Paris and had theirs made out of solid gold!"

"Who told you?"

"It's in the paper. And he's just come of age, a while ago, and paid all his debts."

"Seems rather an excessive person," Tony commented.

Mrs. Donnelly made a little clucking noise to her newspaper: "Tsu! Tsu!—well, poor boy, he does all he can."

"Who?" demanded Fred.

"The Emperor of all the Russias," answered Tony, laughing from under his eyelashes at Kate. "Kate's very partial to him. I sometimes feel quite piqued."

"Well, I don't care. He's a very good man; he wants—"

"They say," remarked Estella dreamily, "that she's got a gold typewriter set with diamonds."

"It was the milkman," announced Barbara, drawing in her head.

Estella had picked up an illustrated weekly, and she now passed it with a tender smile to Mrs. Donnelly. "Wouldn't Barbara look sweet fixed just the way the Czarina is? Those pearl ropes—I'll bet they're yards long—they're just the sort of thing that suits Barbara."

Mrs. Donnelly gravely regarded the Czarina's likeness. "She looks very handsome," she said. "I hope she'll be happy. She's got a kind of a sad look. I knew a girl once, a nice, pretty girl as could be—she looked something like our Barbara, too, only Barbara's the handsomest of the lot—had something that same look at her wedding, and before the very first year was out he had run off to Canada with a pot of money—he was a partner in a wholesale bicycle business—and another woman, and she, poor thing, had to take in boarders."

Estella sat up, clutched her floating yellow dressing-sack about her neck, and with the other hand shoved back the toppling mass of her black hair. "Well!" she cried, "I'd like to know what you mean by that, Kate Donnelly! I didn't think I should ever be insulted at my own lunch-table by people talking as if it were a disgrace to take boarders! You ought to honor me for it, or any other honest way of making my living. I've got my fatherless child to support, and I'm proud of it,

and as God is my witness, I think a woman can be a lady, no matter how little money she has. And if you mean to insinuate anything against Tom Baker, I can tell you that whatever my troubles with my husband may have been—and I think you might have had more consideration for Regina than to mention a woman—there never was a breath against his honesty, and he never quarrelled with but one of his employers in his life, that would bring men he knew home, drunk, to sleep in the office, and that diamond bracelet I gave him to get the doctor's bill on once when he was out of work, he went and got out and gave it back to me as soon as I got my divorce!"

There was a glass pitcher full of lemonade on the table. Estella helped herself to a long drink, and added: "And even so, I shouldn't call you exactly boarders, anyway."

Mrs. Donnelly arose in trembling majesty and took her hat off the mantelpiece. "I'll send you my address, Estella Baker," she said, "as soon as I get one. And you can send your bill in when you like. I wouldn't speak to a dog as you've spoken to me, and I wouldn't take it from you if you were the Queen of England. And as for calling us boarders, I should think you wouldn't, with Tony working like a black slave, and Fred putting off the butcher, and me paying regular every Saturday. I wouldn't have stayed here to have my ears deafened the way you screech, Estella Baker, for anybody but Tony, that was the sweetest child I ever saw when I used to go on as extra in the Amazon marches at his father's theatre, before that sneaking hound of a Gillespie got it away from him—though I've worked hard here to help

you, and glad to do it, as you well know. I hope, when I'm gone—"

"Before you go, Kate, dear," said Tony, putting his pipe on the mantelpiece, "we'd better clear the table, or I fear Barbara will be forced to work."

Barbara rose hurriedly, but like a creature moving in a sleep, and Mrs. Donnelly snatched up a plate with one hand, and with the other pushed the young girl back into the window-seat. "Stay where you are," said she, and strode majestically into the kitchen. Her brother-in-law, who had not bestowed so much as a glance upon the previous debate, now lifted a newspaper in his turn. "There's a cut of the Felix house," he said. "Down below, you know, on Riverside Drive, the white stone place. Good print, isn't it? I wish I'd gone in for photography when I had that chance three years ago."

"I never thought I'd much care about having that house," said Estella. "The windows come so low down, I'd always be afraid Regina would fall out. Still, of course, you could put wires across them."

"Forgot the tablecloths," cried Tony, running in and snatching up the bucket. "None of you thought of them, of course—loafers! If I have a sunstroke on the roof, say I died true." Tony peered into the pitcher of lemonade as he passed it. "Oof! Little drops of lemon. Nothing more spirited for the laborer, the poor laborer, Mrs. Tommy?" At the hall door—"I will return to you, Barbara," he said to the back of that young lady's head, and vanished.

"Tony gone pok?" asked Regina.

"I wonder," said Estella, "if Tony's written those words for Barbara to sing Sunday night."

"Anny Bobs ta Rina pok?" Regina persisted.

"No, no," said Estella, "Auntie Barbara can't take Regina to the park now; it's too hot."

"Too hot?"

"Yes; too hot. Make Auntie sick. Poor Auntie."

"Poo Anny; Anny Bobs ta Rina pok?"

"No; now, Regina, you're naughty."

Regina puffed out an under-lip and nodded: "Rina awn do finey aws," said she plaintively.

"Oh, Regina, why don't you learn to talk plainer? Oo bid dirl, ess oo is, oo bid dirl! You mostly know what she says, Fred."

"She said, 'Regina wants to go on the flying horses.' "

"Oh, darling, mamma hasn't any money for that—No, indeed, Barbara, car-fare and everything!—You can go on the flying horses when mamma gets an engagement. Here—here's a nickel. You can play with that."

Regina turned the nickel over and over in the creases of her little warm hand, and Fred returned to his former statement—"I guess it'll be a long day before any of us get an engagement."

"I'll bet you anything you like," cried Estella, "that I'll be starring in my own play before the year's out. That play's bound to succeed, because it speaks right to people's hearts. I wrote every word of it out of my own soul. There isn't a line in it without a throb, and yet the comedy interest's good, too. I think Barbara'll be quite sweet in that. She's a little tall for comedy, but then—. You know Dick Tannehill. He says it's the greatest play that's been written in America since 'The Banker's Daughter.' "

Mrs. Donnelly, who had been going to and from the kitchen with the dishes, now swept away the tablecloth, and Estella, still clutching the lemonade, and waving the butter-knife, leaned back to give her free play. She concluded, "He asked me why I didn't let Olga Nethersole have it."

"Well, dearie," said Mrs. Donnelly, "Why don't you? I'm sure you deserve a little luck."

"Well," said Estella, "I guess not. Nobody'll ever play that part but me. There's plenty of managers would be glad to take the play, and put their own old stars into it; night and day I'm afraid some one will steal my ideas. If I could only get a good part in New York and show people just once what I could do, there'd be plenty of managers ready to back me in my play afterward!"

Fred yawned. "Stella," said he, "when you do get an engagement, you quarrel with the stage-manager and come home."

Estella planted her elbows on the table. "That's because they've got such old fuss-budgets of stage-managers. I guess after I've sat up all night, wearing myself to pieces studying my art, I'm not going to be dictated to by those ignorant things. It was mean of that old Dawkins, though, to fight with me, when I'd had my pink crèpe dress made for their old piece, and I hadn't even got it paid for yet. Wasn't that a sweet dress, Kate? I wore my real coral and gold belt with it, that Tommy gave me while we were married. He always said he did like me to look nice, Tommy did. I've got plenty of clothes to take an engagement, if I could only get one. I wish the dogs hadn't broken Whopper, and

I'd ask her when we any of us were going to get anything."

"We always ask her that, and she always lies. We'd better ask her when the alimony's coming."

Estella looked at the pieces of the broken planchette which were scattered over the floor. "They looked so cunning breaking it up—and Tony would name her that," she added, with apparent irrelevance. "Hand me the cards, Fred, and let me see if I can see anything."

As she shuffled the pack, her mind went back to the pink crèpe.

"If she likes to fix it over, I'll let Barbara wear that dress to Helen Graham's Sunday night, and I can take her blue waist; you know, Kate, that one you made out of the old pair of sleeves."

She looked cordially at Barbara, but the girl did not answer nor turn her head.

"She's dreaming," said Fred. "Love's young dream, Barbara? Estella, do you see a dark man?"

"Let her be," pleaded Mrs. Donnelly; "maybe she is really thinking about Tony."

"You make me tired, Kate!" said the fraternal Fred. "You bet Tony can do his own love-making. You bet he can look after himself. I wonder," he added in a half-voice, "if she says things to him, though, when they're alone. He keeps on so."

"You never can tell," Estella sighed.

"She might be very glad to have the chance of him!" Mrs. Donnelly almost cried aloud.

"I guess my sister doesn't need to be glad of anybody, Kate Donnelly, and he's very unsettled and extravagant; I've always heard so."

"Oh, rot!" said Fred, getting in ahead of his sister-in-law. "What of it? He's only a boy, and most of the year he's more money than he knows what to do with. I don't know why it should be worse for him to throw gold dollars around than for anybody else to do it."

"Slander loves a shining mark," said Mrs. Donnelly sententiously.

Fred laughed. "Well, there's nothing so very shining about Tony, except a first-class job with the great Engle in the fall. But, of course, he's lucky to have that, at his age; and I daresay it's his luck and his good looks and those kid ways of his starts those notions. He's really a corking fellow, Tony is, and straight, as far as I know. But if he buys a girl a pair of gloves—and I don't say he doesn't like a pretty girl—there's as much cackle as if another man had bought her Fifth Avenue. And he's too easy-tempered; he lets stories get around about him, things that matter. Look at that old gander last week at Reilly's—said it was Mrs. Rexal who got him that part with Rexal, and—you know what people say."

"Oh!" said Barbara, "it's all cowardly. It's a lie." ("Why, she's awake after all," laughed Fred.) She turned in upon them from the window, and her live voice broke into the room with its curious, little throaty richness. "I—I don't deceive myself about Tony. I daresay he's wild, I daresay he's unreliable, but we must all know that he was never—base." Her face flushed and paled, her hands clinched in her lap. "We're unsteady and extravagant ourselves, Estella, and what should we have done this summer, who would have given

us any pleasure, who would have helped us, who would have worked for us, what should we have done here, without Tony? I remember all the time, even if we're only a caprice of his, even if he doesn't mean a word he says, we are his debtors a thousand, thousand times!"

The hall door opened, and they heard Tony banging the bucket and whistling "My girl's a high-born lady," as he went into his own room.

"My dear! my dear!" Estella warned her.

"That's right, Barbara," said Fred. "I tell you the truth, I didn't think you had so much sense. There's nothing the matter with Tony except a first-class appetite for being happy. Look at him all this summer—till his next season's manager puts a stop to it—goes and makes a darned jockey of himself, for ten dollars a week, riding their plug steeplechasers in a backwoods melodrama. Does anybody say a word for him about that? Why, no. You'd think they all did it! But he went to dinner at the Waldorf last night with a fellow I know that had made some money at Brighton, and a couple of girls, and I'll bet you everybody on Broadway's talking about it."

"At the Waldorf? Is that where he was?" cried Barbara. "Last night!" She leaned forward and stared at Fred intently. Something in her accent recalled to the assemblage their own last night's dinner; the little, hot, untidy dining-room, and the scramble in getting the dishes washed up, and the fact that the ice had given out. Only Estella remembered for the first time that Barbara had dressed her hair elaborately yesterday afternoon, and had tried to press out her white lace waist, and had scorched it. She remembered in the same flash that the

morning before, Tony had praised the stately habit of dressing for dinner. She pushed away the cards, and in her turn looked at Barbara, as Barbara was looking at Fred.

"Was *that* where he was?" said the girl again.

"I'm sure he had every right to be!" cried Kate.

"I'm sure we should be the last to question that right," Barbara said.

" 'Feathered like a peacock, just as gay,' " sang Tony's whistle, clipped suddenly by the sound of splashing water.

"That boy's got his head under the faucet again!" exclaimed Mrs. Donnelly. "He'll give himself neuralgia."

"Why, Barbara!" Estella cried; "yesterday was—"

"Oh, yes," she moved her hands helplessly in her lap, "I was twenty yesterday."

"Oh, dearie! I'm so sorry! I never thought of it."

"Tony never knew of it," said Kate.

"Why, no," Barbara replied; "why should he?"

"Here he comes now," said Fred.

He came in as radiant with idleness as he had lately been with work, and very fresh from his encounter with the faucet, whose drops were still shining, bright and cold, in his black hair. There was what Estella called a divan at one side of the room; Tony composed himself upon its cushions with a fan and a glass of lemonade, and lounged there, staring at the ceiling like a contented child. He found a considerable diversion in teaching himself to drink without changing his attitude and, while he was acquiring this art, the talk tried to jerk itself past his interruption. Everybody had been a lit-

tle startled by Barbara's outbreak, everybody felt that Fred would better have kept his knowledge to himself, and a little uneasy bewilderment, as at a treachery to Tony, shadowed more lively interests and quieted the loud talk. They looked rather gravely at the profile view which was once more accorded them of Barbara's head.

"What's the matter, Estella?" asked Tony, glancing at the newspapers. "Aren't there any murders?" At the continued silence he lifted his head. "Hello! What's the scandal?"

"You are!" said Estella. "The idea of you being around here, anyhow, and me with a sister that's just twenty!"

"There has to be somebody to watch Fred," said Tony.

"It's Fred's been giving you away. Oh, he didn't mean to! But he says you throw your money around."

"He wants to show you what a beautiful nature I have," said the accused. He looked lovingly at Fred, because he had black murder in his heart. He looked with anxious stealth at Barbara, but Barbara seemed not to notice.

"He says people say things about you," Estella continued.

"Slander loves a shining mark," repeated Mrs. Donnelly, with solemn emphasis.

"Nice Kate!" said Tony. He went and sat down on the floor by her chair, and stroked her hand. "Good Kate! Pretty Kate!"

" I'm sure," continued Mrs. Donnelly, pretending to push him off, "nobody could be a better boy around the house than he is. Could they, now could they? I

bet you'd all want him back, fast enough, if he went away! I've known him since he was no bigger than that," measuring about the height of a footstool, "and never saw a cross word come out of his mouth, and I can tell you, if this never having a cent is hard on us, he's had more money to throw away when he was a child on a rocking-horse than would pay this miserable old rent time and again, and not a complaint out of him."

"Good Tony!" said that gentleman. He added in a tone of profound conviction, "Noble Tony!"

Estella studied him with her chin in her hand.

"Yes," she said, "you're a very sweet boy. But—you're Irish."

"I once had a father, Mrs. Baker, and he was French."

"Well, goodness, that only makes it worse!"

"Oh, dear!" said Tony drowsily, "where French and Irish meet, and make a mixture that is not discreet. That's for you, Barbara, who love the poets!" He opened his eyes and stared sadly at his hostess. "It's inelegant to display such a prejudice against the foreign, dear Estella."

"I hope you've written those new verses to Gus Nevins' song, since you're so smart; Barbara won't have time to learn them for Sunday night, Tony Regnault, if you've put them off again, and she won't sing the old ones. Mr. Nevins's going to be there to hear her, Sunday, and he's going to sing, himself."

"Dear me, how unnecessary of him!" said Tony. He went back to the couch where his banjo lay, and began to touch an air upon it as he spoke the lines. Certainly, he looked at Barbara.

"The sleeping princess quiet lay
And dreamed the empty years away,
Her love delayed;
And princes came and princes went,
And mighty kings magnificent
As they above her beauty bent
Were all afraid, afraid.

"And no man knew what word would wake,
Nor for what fortune's golden sake,
Or deed of love,
That shining princess would arise,
Unveil the kindness of her eyes,
And stretch the hand that he would prize
All worlds above, above.

"A beggar at the palace gate
Had a light heart to tempt his fate
And entered in;
He wished no other joy but this,
And this for death he would not miss;
He touched her sweet mouth with a kiss —
She waked for him, for him!"

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Donnelly, "isn't that lovely!"

"That last line doesn't rhyme, Tony," said Estella, with severity.

"Will you sing it, Barbara?" Tony asked.

"Thank you," she said. "It is very charming. You were very kind to write it. But I don't think I shall sing it. I don't think I shall sing at all."

Said Tony: "That pink thing you have on is very becoming to you, my own."

"You mustn't call Barbara that, Tony!" cried Estella. "It doesn't sound well. I can't have it."

"Not even when it isn't true?" Tony pleaded. "Not

even to please Barbara? If you'll move over a little, Barbara, I'll sit by you a minute." He secured to himself a part of the window seat, and remained there, swinging his heels and playing "Daisy" on the banjo. Barbara's slim young stateliness, aided by her trailing skirts, made her look almost as tall as he, and far more resolute. She seemed to him, as he studied her out of the corner of an eye, to be very pale and very tragically sweet.

"I'm glad, Estella," he said, "that you are beginning to awaken to a sense of your responsibilities about us. We shall be almost grown up in a minute. 'These pretty babes went hand in hand!'—you remember what happened to *their* wicked guardian, Mrs. Baker, after the robin-redbreasts had covered them with leaves? I am afraid Barbara would be rather long for robin-redbreasts; she would keep them busy."

Estella smiled disdainfully. "You look like a yard of pump-water, the both of you," said she.

"The each of us, Estella. And it's still incorrect to be cross with my physique—Napoleon was once slender. Barbara's, to be sure," lifting Barbara's lovely wrist between his thumb and finger, and critically regarding it—"Barbara's, to be sure, is no great shakes."

She did not smile, she did not even withdraw her hand. Tony laid it carefully in her lap. "Cheer up, Anny Bobs!" he whispered.

At this moment the entire apartment was filled with the roar of Regina's rage. "Mahmu a my nicky-Mahmu a my nicky."

"What?" said everyone; "what is it?"

"Mahmu a my nicky! A my nicky! Bah Mahmu!"

Fred was stooping over Regina. "Mohammed ate my nickel," he translated. Mohammed was the older terrier.

"A my nicky," assented Regina.

"Ate her nickel? Heavens, swallowed it? It'll kill him!" Estella fell on her knees and glared down the throat of Mohammed, who wagged his tail feebly. "Bah Mahmu!" cried Regina, beating the air and howling lustily. "A my nicky! Mahmu a my nicky!"

"Do you think it'll kill him?" persisted Estella; "was Stella's old boy? Did want doctor?"

"Wa my nicky!" entreated Regina.

"It seems to me extremely forehanded of him," said Tony to Regina. "You know you nearly ate it yourself."

Regina stopped crying and stared at him. She began slowly to smile and dimple, and presently extended a hand. "Nicky," said she.

Tony laid a copper on her palm. "Penny," he said; "not nicky. Nough."

Regina went over to Estella and pulled her arm. "Mah-ma, nicky."

Estella closed Mohammed's mouth with her fingers and kissed his nose. "Him eat nickels?" she inquired. "No, I haven't got another nickel for you, Regina, I haven't got—Oh, don't cry. Here, you can have my pearl heart. And here," reaching for a clean napkin and a blue pencil from a crowded trunk-lid at her back, "we'll make rag-dolly, shall we?"

Tony leaped upon her, and wrenched the napkin from her grasp. "I would never wish to interfere with any of your little diversions, Estella," said he, returning in

triumph to his seat, "but it is I who wash the linen."

"Oh, Lord, oh, Lord, oh, Lord!" yawned Fred. "What a deadly drag it is! I wonder shall I ever work again?"

"I wonder," said Estella, "why it's always us who can't get parts? We can all act."

"Well," said Fred, "we could if we were let. But the question now is—Mr. Bates told Barbara he'd be here, after that blamed rent, at three o'clock, and it's about that now; what are we going to tell him?"

"If I could only get a backer for my play—" began Estella. "Oh, I do wish you'd stop fooling with that banjo, Tony, you put me out so!"

"Say, look here, Tony!" cried Fred, "since you've got a job coming to you—I know it isn't the proper thing, but—couldn't you get something in advance from your management?"

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Donnelly, "and start out in debt and be all the season getting even!"

Tony looked hopefully at Barbara, but Barbara positively frowned.

"Unh-unh!" said Tony, shaking his head at Fred. "Nev-er bor-row from the man-age-ment. If—you—do, —you'll—never save a cent"—he struck a discreet tinkle from the banjo, and added: "In—the—mean-time, who will pay the rent?"

Without turning her head round to the company, Barbara said; "I daresay we shan't have to pay the rent at all, if I marry Mr. Bates."

They were too surprised to speak, but as they gradually recovered their breath they turned and stared at her; all but Tony, who went on touching the banjo

and looking at it carefully. Estella leaned forward and knocked on the table with the handle of the butter-knife.

"What do you mean by that?" she said.

Barbara put up one hand and smoothed her back hair with deliberate fingers. "When I went into the hall this morning to see if I couldn't inveigle him to go away"—Tony lifted his head quickly and angrily, and frowned from Barbara to Estella—"as I was asked to do," Barbara continued, "he asked me if I would marry him. Or rather he asked me to think about it. He's coming back at three to—to help us think about it. He wants to speak to you, Estella."

"Well, I'm not going to have anything to do with it!" Estella cried. "And you needn't frown at me, Tony Regnault, for I was taking the curling-irons out of the gas-range that very minute, or I would have gone out to him myself. Nobody shall ever say I forced her into it. I wouldn't wreck the life of my own sister, not if he was to pay me for it in diamonds! But God knows, Tony, what's to become of her, the way things are; for even if ever she can make up her mind and marry you, you're all alike, you actors; I wouldn't trust a girl's heart to the best of you, though it's true Jim Folso did take care of his mother till the day she died—I know that myself—sent her ten dollars a week year out and in; he's had to borrow it from Tommy, many a time. No, sir, she'll have to decide it for her own self, Barbara will."

And at this moment, as though by special arrangement with a dramatic deity, there was a ring at the front door.

"It needn't be he, you know," said Estella, confronting a circle of stricken faces.

But it was he. Fred went to the door, and ushered in a large, plump, blond gentleman in the elder middle years. He had his coat on his arm and his hat in his hand, and he was mopping his face and forehead with a huge clean handkerchief.

"Good-day, all," said he. "No, don't trouble yourself for me, ma'am," to Estella, who had risen, mute and regal, and was schooling herself to the manner of a dowager empress. He accepted a chair, however, and looked around with simple confidence upon the company. "It is hot! When you come to my time of life, you feel the stairs."

"You'll have a glass of lemonade, Mr. Bates," said Tony. He had brought a glassful and his own fan to the landlord, and the two men looked at each other as the glass changed hands.

"Thank you," said Mr. Bates, "I don't object."

An embarrassed silence followed these civilities. Tony had cuddled on to the couch again with his inevitable banjo, and the terriers had come forward and were sniffing at Mr. Bates's legs. Dooley drew back suddenly and showed his teeth; Mohammed instantly broke into a volley of shrill yelps.

"Knows I'm the landlord," tactfully remarked Mr. Bates, setting down his glass and smiling jovially around. He snapped his fingers at Dooley, "Nice boy, good fellow." The dogs thrust their bodies back and their heads forward and continued to grumble and to growl. "Well, I guess from what Miss Barbara told me this morning, you didn't want to see me to-day."

"I'll be frank with you, Mr. Bates," said Estella. "My allowance hasn't come yet. God is my witness, I expected it the day before yesterday. Though why I should expect it from a man that forsakes his own child, and that I never would have married if I hadn't been infatuated with him—a girl's infatuation, Mr. Bates, you know what that is—I don't know. But I was so sure it would come to-day, while that lace sale was on at Siegel & Cooper's I thought of dressing to be ready right after lunch—didn't I, Barbara? But it hasn't come. I'm sure you're the last man, Mr. Bates, that would want me to take the bread out of my child's mouth."

"Must be a pretty mean man," said Mr. Bates; "won't send money to keep his own little girl. But you know, Mrs. Baker, I know people talk, especially the Irish, but owners have to make their property pay, someways."

"Oh, well," said Estella, "after all, this isn't a flat you could really expect much rent for. If I'd had my money this month, there's a lot of things I'd have spoken to you about. We haven't any awnings, for one thing, and it makes the place like a bake-oven, and it makes it look like a tenement; though, for that matter, there isn't a tenement but what has awnings. And that woman in the flat over us, you'll have to speak to her. She says insulting things about my dogs, down the airshaft. Yes, she does; she means to insult me, because I told her she ought to be ashamed to let her parrot use such language. I couldn't let Regina listen to it, Mr. Bates, indeed I couldn't. And the storeroom leaks, or a pipe's burst in it, or something, and I shan't pay my rent at all if my Saratoga trunk is damaged, for there's a lot of ward-

robe in it, and things no money could replace. My white satin—I only wore it two weeks—is in there, and my husband's miniature's in that trunk. I shouldn't like to see that damaged."

"Well, well," said Mr. Bates, heartlessly putting the miniature of Mr. Baker to one side: "I guess you know it isn't altogether about the rent I came. I guess maybe Miss Barbara's told you about what I said to her this morning. No, ma'am, no, gent'men, don't go. I know it's not the usual thing, but you've always seemed sort of like a family here, and I know you'll all talk about it when I'm gone, so might's well have it now. And I'm counting that maybe you'll kind of help me out. I'm not supposing"—he turned a pair of patient eyes on Barbara, and the tame, kindly lovingness in them seemed at once to shield and to caress her—"I'm not supposing Miss Barbara's what's called in love with me. 'Twouldn't be natural. But I think she might like me if she came to know me and gave me a fair show. Especially when she knows more o' the way people get along than she does now; she'd see how different I'd treat her from the way a lot of men do that have got wives and don't know how to use 'em. I always thought this was a kind of a rough world for women, and I'd like to do what's really right by one of them."

Nobody answered, but Tony lifted a long grave look to his.

"And so I thought," continued Mr. Bates, "that some of you who haven't such fancy ideas as it's natural enough she's got, would speak to her, and tell her that if—if you don't see something as pretty as you'd like, it's best to take something that's all wool."

He was greatly pleased at this flower of speech, and looked up quickly and brightly at Barbara, and Barbara smiled. She had a slow smile of infinite possibilities, and Mr. Bates looked at it a little before he proceeded: "I've got money; a couple of hundred thousand, one way and another, and more making—and I've got health and good habits, and the store I set by her, you wouldn't believe it. Well, I guess she's kind of notiony and high-spirited, and I don't seem much to her, but I'm relying you'll tell her those are things make life comfortable and worth having just the same; and I should think you, Mrs. Baker, that's had your own troubles in your time, would feel kind o' scared to have anything so pretty and so kind of high-headed and proud, around like this."

"God is my witness, Mr. Bates—" began Estella leaning forward.

"Not," hurriedly continued the suitor, "not as I've got anything to say against your profession. Those that like it—why, let 'em, I say. But it ain't the life for a woman, is it? Now, is it? Nor, I shouldn't think myself, for a man either. I don't mean any disrespect, but it does seem to me a lady like Miss Barbara's got something more coming to her than this, and what's more," he added, meditatively, "it seems like it don't pay."

Tony, who was leaning on his knees with his chin in his hands, lifted his guileless eyes, and said sweetly; "It's only fair to the profession, Mr. Bates, to tell you that we are not its most victorious exponents."

"Likely, likely," admitted Mr. Bates, a little mystified.

"But we can keep a woman out of it, Mr. Reeno, and take her clean away from all this stage business."

"You don't think," inquired Tony—this was the only base advantage Tony took—"you don't think she ought to have anything to say about it, herself—the being taken clean away from all this stage business?"

"Not when she's got a man to look after her," said Mr. Bates, "and give her a comfortable home."

"Oh!" admitted Tony, and confided a twinkle to the flooring.

"Well, my dear," said Estella, "it's a very great responsibility for me, and I don't want to urge you. But if I'd married Mr. Fettercamp when he wanted me to, we'd all be rolling in our own carriages this minute. There was his sister married an Italian prince, and she wasn't a circumstance to Barbara. She's dead, now, poor girl, but she married him. But, no, I would have Tommy Baker because I loved him—indeed, I did, Barbara Floyd, I loved him madly—but there's no use marrying for love when you can't even be sure he'll send you your alimony right. And because I wrecked my life, Barbara, I'd like to see you marry somebody worthy. I'd say the same if it was Regina. Regina—Regina Baker, don't you put that penny in your mouth. Come here—come here to mamma."

Regina advanced slowly, and Estella gathered the curls out of her warm little neck and hastily polished off her face with a handkerchief. "Don't you know Mr. Bates, darling? What do nice little girls say to gentlemen?"

Regina ducked her head, made an unintelligible sound and extended her hand.

"How-de-do, miss," said Mr. Bates, shaking the hand. "I'm sorry I didn't think to bring you some candy. Better luck next time, eh? Why, why, you mustn't begin to cry, little girl. Don't you want to be friends with me!" Regina nodded. "Don't you want to grow up and have a pony to ride, and learn the piano?"

"Awn go finey aws," said Regina.

"She wants to go on the flying horses," translated the patient Fred. "Merry-go-round, you know."

"And so she shall!" assented Mr. Bates.

Regina glowed with joy. "An Anny Bobs?"

"And Auntie Barbara?" Mr. Bates repeated after Fred, "why yes, indeed."

Regina, in a kind of vacuous triumph, smiled around the room and had an inspiration. "An Tony?"

"Why," responded Mr. Bates hesitatingly, "maybe he wouldn't want to."

A perfect torrent of joyous sounds, intended to be affirmative, burst from Regina's lips. In the vigor of her confidence she flung herself upon the legs of Mr. Bates and beat his knees. "Oh, yef! As time, as time, aw lone, Rina an Anny Bobs and Tony go finey aws, go roun an roun an roun, an Tony caw go ring!"

There was a suspicion of thickness in the voice of the translator: "Once, last time, nobody else happened to be there. Tony and Barbara rode, too, and Tony caught the gold ring; you know, with those little blunt swords."

"Why, he's a very clever young man," Mr. Bates affably replied.

Regina smote his knees and shrieked with joy. "Oh, yef!" she repeated, "an Anny Bobs gah go ring."

"You said it was Mr. Tony caught the gold ring, little girl."

"That's what she means to say," said Fred.

"No! no!" Regina passionately insisted.

"Anny Bobs *gah* go ring! Anny Bobs gah go ring *now!* Rina fine it."

"Well, well, Regina," Estella interrupted, "Mr. Bates can't talk to you all day!"

"I paid it her as a reward of merit. I assure you, I gave the man a dime for it," said Tony, softly, with a little blush.

Mr. Bates passed over the insignificance of Tony's shabby boyhood with the good temper of a potentate. "Well," said he, giving his face a final wipe, "I guess I've said what I laid out to. I didn't come here to talk soft. That part of it's just my business, and hers—if she'll have it." He got up and took his hat and went over to Barbara. "Miss Barbara," he said, "if you can make out to like me—like me well enough to have me —you'll never regret it." He held out his hand, and Barbara gave him hers with her long boyish clasp. Kate followed him to the door and let him out.

An unpleasant silence settled upon the company. Its members were suddenly set face to face with decision and responsibility; they were crowded and jostled and made to feel strange and ill at ease, here, in the dilapidated cheer of their own home, by the encroaching wisdom of other worlds. Barbara continued to sit idly in the blinding sunshine, like a person passive before the issue of events and indifferent to it. The fierce light seemed to set her apart from counsel and from tenderness and to blare aloud her beauty.

Estella, after two or three clearings of her throat, inquired with a kind of trembling pomp: "And what do you think about it yourself, my dear?"

Barbara rose and came slowly to the table. She stood stroking the edge of it with her hand, and finally she said: "I'll tell you what I think. I think that if I were married to Mr. Bates, I shouldn't have to run out into the hall to ogle landlords to cheat them out of their rent. I think I shouldn't have to pretend to be out when the milkman comes, nor wheedle the butcher, nor have the gas turned off. I shouldn't have to walk out of a hateful mess like this"—Estella gasped—"dressed as if I were going to a beauty show, because I wanted work, and into offices where I should be looked over as if I were a horse. I think I shouldn't owe every stitch I wear and everything I put into my mouth to my sister's divorced husband. That's what I think. I think I should be looked out for and taken care of and kept away from hurt, as other women are!"

Estella began: "Well, of all the—"

"And I think," continued Barbara, her voice rising to a hysteric pitch, "that my husband would be respected everywhere, and would work for me and be true and good, and not depend for his pleasure upon a friend's getting some money, and taking him out to dinner with girls—"

"Oh, oh! Barbara!" cried Fred.

It was such a good dinner, Barbara!" said Tony. Unquestionably, his smile was coming back.

The dogs at the same moment began to quarrel over a bone and their voices rose in ear-splitting dispute.

Estella cuffed one of them and the other carried the bone into the sitting-room, from whence issued ecstatic lickings and crunchings.

In the comparative pause Mrs. Donnelly's tearful indignation burst upon Barbara: "We all know what you mean by that last, Barbara Floyd," she cried. "And I guess there are other people, besides you, in this house that are sick and tired of being poor, and the fuss there is about meals, and that have spent all their money on you, and whose fathers were rich and famous, and thought nothing of living at Delmonico's, before ever you were born. If the butcher is swindled out of his meat, I don't see but you eat your share of it. If you think it's messy here, why don't you get up and clean it? Tony's scrubbed the kitchen while you've been lolling there, and you wouldn't know how to cook anything but a boiled egg and a pickle to this day if it wasn't for Tony. You're a bad, ungrateful girl, Barbara Floyd, and Tony—"

Estella pitched her voice above the voices of Mrs. Donnelly and the dogs: "Don't you try to bully my sister, Kate Donnelly, she—"

Tony struck the table sharply with his hand. "Come, Barbara," he said. "We must get the washing down now." He held the door open for her, and without looking round she went past him into the hall.

At the head of the top flight of stairs there was a door with a heavy, sliding weight, and Tony, who had run upstairs in advance, pushed it open, and with a wave of the hand, like a lavish host, welcomed Barbara to the great, shining roof. It was very wide and hot

and silent, and little airs that the sidewalk never knew drifted over its cornices. Said Tony: "To where, beyond the voices, there is peace."

Barbara stepped out fearlessly between the glare of the red roofs and the glare of the blue and golden sky. With a happy breath she turned her unshielded face up to the light. This stretch of gleaming tin had long been their private garden, and they had known it in many kinds of weather. "Oh, Tony!" she said, in a little soft, fluttered, laughing voice, "we needn't bother about the washing yet, need we?"

"Come," said Tony. "I've found a place where we can see the river. I found it for us this morning. Mustn't tell!"

"No," she said, and put her hand out to him, like a child. "Show me."

Behind its newer and broader substitute an old chimney rose out of the roof's western bulwark, from which it parted company a few feet above the ground in an angle of crumbling brick and mortar. Tony jumped into the niche of this angle and held down a hand to Barbara. "Step up and I'll lift you," he directed. She was beside him in an instant, and found herself breast-high above the parapet, which served as an elbow rest. It was too broad to let them see straight down into the common, cluttered street, and beyond the shops and the low buildings over the way stumbled the vine-smothered huts of squatters; past a bit of leafy, broken ground the wide green of market gardens was dotted with the gold of sunflowers and the scarlet of geraniums, a single close-shorn lawn was banked with the white and the mystic blue of hydrangeas. Further yet, between the

shimmer of poplars and the frown of purple hills, the river flashed and drifted.

"It's good here," said Tony.

Barbara stretched her arm across the parapet as though she stretched it into the coolness of fresh water. "There's a yacht—a white one; watch! Going down the river! Let's pretend it's going straight to sea, Tony—what fun! Across the sea."

"We're going with it, you know. Just ourselves, of course, and a telescope, maybe, and plenty of honey wrapped up in a five-pound note. All the little fishes will come and beg us for the honey, and you'll give it to them out of your hands, till I shall be jealous. It isn't nice to be jealous. I wouldn't let even a little fish suffer it, if I were you, Barbara—Why, Barbara! what foolishness you talk! And you don't even hear me!"

"I wish I could see all this from my own window," she said.

"Ah, but you can't! I had to show it to you, Barbara. It was quite easy to find, but you know you never found it." The little rosy ruffle of Barbara's sleeve lay on the rough edge of the parapet, and Tony bent his head and kissed it. "I was sure you'd like it here. Be good," he said.

The voices of some children singing ring-games on a near fire-escape rose with an accent of their own natures to the two truants on the housetop. Otherwise they seemed the only living souls in a universe made up of two expanses; below them, the wide, sparkling, burning roofs, with one distant fringe of leaves and waters, and above, the radiant, hot blue, luminous and quivering, and scarcely tinged by the white clouds which

slowly sailed across it and banked themselves on the horizon into palaces and temples. Toward the west, where the sun blazed in a splendor that even the eyes of lovers dared not meet, the heavens were almost white —not in pallor, but effulgence, like light incarnate. Small, lazy breezes floated through the sunshine, and brushed, fresh and sweet, against their faces.

"Barbara," said Tony, leaning forward and catching her by both wrists, "where did Regina find my ring?"

She was startled both by the suddenness of his attack and by the strength of his hold, and straining back upon his grasp she remained alert and silent, like a deer. He waited a moment, but she continued passionately quiet, passionately studious of his face. In the pause, the voices of the children arose with a new clearness:

> "And on his breast he wore a star,
> Pointing to the East and West."

"Barbara!"

"Hush!" she insisted. Her breath was fluttering on her lips, and her eyes shining into his:

> "Go choose your East, go choose your West,
> Go choose the one that you love best."

"You kept that ring!" he said. "You kept it—because of me!" Almost as he spoke she had leaped down and away from him, and was running across the roof.

He caught up with her on the low platform of wooden slats amid the flutter of the wet linens.

"Help me take these in," she called to him: "Estella will be angry." She was struggling with the clothespins, and their fingers met over a row of pillow-slips.

"They're not dry yet. Listen, I—"

"There's a breeze come up. It will dry them in a minute." She was moving further and further away.

"Why, see, my sweet, you don't know what you're saying! I want to tell you—"

"Oh," she cried, pausing oppressedly, "what does everybody tell me? That you are idle, that you are extravagant, that you—that you—that girls—"

"Barbara," he said, "though they follow me in their thousands and their ten thousands, though their dead bodies strew my pathway, I will be blind to them. I love you, Barbara."

She retreated again, making as though to reach the door, and he stood still in a sudden bitterness, with a little wound in the dignity of his love. The next instant he was startled to see her, who was so light and true of step, stumble and lose her footing on a broken slat and sink down in a heap with her hands over her face.

He ran up and bent over her without touching her. "Oh, my dear!" he asked; "what is it? Are you hurt? Or were you angry? Would you like me to go away? What is it?"

She lifted her face to his and put her arms around his neck.

"I was thinking of you," she said.

Half an hour later as they still sat on the platform the roof rang with their names, and from under their damp canopy of tablecloths and towels they perceived Estella in the doorway.

"Come on!" she called. "Why, whatever's kept you? Come on! The alimony's come, and we're all going to Coney Island for dinner!"

"Don't be so noisy, Estella!" said Tony. "We're engaged."

"Really? Really, Barbara? Well, I'm glad of it.—Yes, Regina," she called over her shoulder, "come up. Mamma's here.—Well, I'm very glad. And I'll have my white satin cleaned for her as soon as I can. How jolly we're going out to dinner! Like a party for you, Barbara."

"Splendid!" said Tony. "The alimony baked meats did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables."

He sprang up and handed Barbara to her feet. There fell to the ground something Barbara had been showing Tony—a slender ribbon, as long as a watch-chain, and, dangling from its end, a great, clumsy, ridiculous gilt ring. Regina, who came staggering through the doorway, fell upon this latter object with a shriek of joyous recognition. "Anny Bobs gah go ring!" she cried. "Rina awn go finey aws, go finey aws, go roun an roun an roun!"

A VOTARY IN MOTLEY

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I

NOBODY was further from my mind than Regal Cocks, commonly called "His Shakes," when, on a raw day in late October, I alighted at the little bare depot of Steele, Michigan.

Hartaling, the tragedian, with his customary lightsome disregard for practical affairs, had had no heavy man in readiness when Leffitt's notice was almost expired. Our arrangements had been made by telegraph, and joining the company at Steele, I was to play Iago the next night. It was only recovery for me, and I had acted with Hartaling before.

The company was late in getting in and I missed its arrival. At supper time, as I was walking through the chilly and almost empty dining-room of the town's one hotel, somebody at a table waved a hand and called:

"Rogers, old man!"

"Why, Lawrence!"

We had never been more than ordinarily friendly, but a one-night stand is a very hothouse for intimacy. I flung myself, metaphorically, into the arms of Norman Lawrence and sat down at the place next his.

"Glad you've come; expected to find you here."

"Expected to find you here, if it comes to that."

"Huh! Didn't leave Grand Rapids till noon."

"What a fool jump! No earlier train?"

"The Lord knows. Saved a couple of dollars on fares, perhaps."

"The saints preserve us! Hartaling getting economical?"

"Oh, it isn't Hartaling; it's Freelman. He runs the company. Says he's keeping the old boy straight. The governor can't comb his hair unless he tells him to." Freelman was the business manager.

"How is the governor? Getting portly?"

"No, but a little coarse in the grain. Telfair says he's the healthiest Hamlet extant."

Telfair still playing juveniles?"

"Yes, and the heavy woman not within ten years of her."

"Who else is with you? Anybody that I know?"

"No, I think not. Except perhaps Nevins. Well, you know Cocks, I suppose?"

"What!—not Regal? Not His Shakes?"

"The same."

"Why, what's Hartaling doing with him?"

"Supporting him."

I laughed, but recollections crowded out my mirth. "Lawrence," said I, "that man's a mystery to me."

"Well, he isn't to me; I'm sick of his airs—ugly old bungler! What's he ever been but a hanger-on? Booth, Barrett, Adams, all these men he talks about and sniffs at behind their backs; what was he with 'em for? Why, to go on in mobs, because they were sorry for him! And this eternal Shakespeare business—it isn't funny to me, Rogers, it's maddening. He hasn't got a patent on Shakespeare, and, what's more, he knows no more about the only William than my terrier does. He can bam-

boozle the boys by quoting at 'em all day long, but not me. He doesn't understand ten lines of Shakespeare."

"I know," I said, "but that's it. Isn't there something interesting in a man making himself the high priest of the Unfathomable?"

"But, Lord love you, he thinks he's the One Great Fathomer! He thinks he could teach Booth every time! He thinks God put him on this earth for the sole purpose of interpreting Shakespeare!"

"Yes," I said, "you're sneering, but he does think that. And he rolls out those great mouthfuls of tragedy, just as he might roll out lines from Dante without understanding Italian, for the sound of it."

"Ach! You can take my word for it—it's pose! You can't make me believe a man's crazy over poetry that won't spend fifteen cents for a drink! However, since it'll flatter you, the liking's reciprocal. You're one of the few people Cocks is willing to let live."

Before I could answer, two or three of the men came in and then the heavy woman—a Miss Marsh—tall, thin, with candid eyes, young and very serious. She ate sparingly and soon retired. Almost as she left, Teresa Telfair came in.

Miss Telfair was also tall, with a faded face, colorless and pretty. She looked tired and rather peevish, and her shoulders were muffled in a whitish woolen shawl which she drew round her with something not sufficiently decided to be called a shiver. There was about her a sort of boneless, shiftless, wavy dignity that somehow suggested an old silk waist. She acknowledged my presence in a soft, fretful monotone, and conversation languished. I myself was nervous and un-

comfortable. The ineffable desolation of a one-night stand settled upon me like a cold mist.

Suddenly, as I was gulping down some pinkish tea, I felt upon my shoulder a rather claw-like pressure, and a deep, cracked, much-mannered voice of inextinguishable melancholy tolled out the words: "Once again our very good friend is with us. Not all the discomfort of the day weighs with this hour."

I reached for Cock's hand, and he took the chair next me. Lawrence rose to go, and nodded his head to me. "Coming in front?" said he.

"I don't know, but I may be around for the last act, after I've finished up on Iago,—oh, but,—sit through Ingomar! at this stage of the game! Can I?"

> "It is a tale,
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing."

intoned Cocks with his funereal smile.

"Lord, Cocks!" fretted Miss Telfair, rising and pulling at her shawl with a languid viciousness, "we get enough of that in the theatre. Do let us have a rest at meals." Cocks sat back mute. There was a suggestion of the martyr in his manner which was inexpressibly irritating. Miss Telfair trailed from the room, and His Shakes and I were left alone.

My friend toyed meditatively with his spoon before he spoke. "Is it not wonderfully grateful to you," he began, "to return to the fountain-head, Mr. Rogers. To drink of the waters and to pass the cup to others? Especially after the empty vulgarity that you have known?"

"Yes," I returned, "it is. I think a man who is

brought up in the legitimate, Mr. Cocks, hankers after it always."

His Shakes sighed. "The legitimate! I had thought from your remark to Mr. Lawrence, my dear sir, you were of the stricter faith."

I could not repress a smile. "Ah, well, Mr. Cocks," said I, " give other blank verse a chance! Alas! man cannot live by the best alone."

His Shakes made a slight gesture as though he had refused a dish. " To the nature alien from the Master, there is food in the servants' hall," he said. "Doubtless in this company there is a great drawback, the character of the chief interpreter, a wine-bibber, a witless Falstaff."

A stab of indignation wounded my pity for the man. He was a pensioner on Hartaling's bounty, a useless filler of a position coveted by better men, a conceited, prating old ingrate. "Hartaling is my employer," said I curtly.

Cocks plucked at the tablecloth with thin, weak-jointed fingers. His eyes were shining. "It is that which so offends me," he replied. "The man is a son of ignorance, a butcher, while you are, you—you love Shakespeare."

He said this last with a sudden simplicity, with a flush and tremor that touched and startled me. When I left Regal Cocks for Iago, it was that last note of indisputable, all-excusing sincerity which remained with me. I do not think it was my vanity which could not dislike the man.

As the weeks went by, this sensation of pity, not untouched with admiration, indicated my habitual attitude

toward Cocks, and indeed I thought the company, as a whole, behaved kindly to the old man. But then, though he was weak and had a racking cough and life must have been one long discomfort on his tiny salary, he was always ready to do a service, and if his courtesy was somewhat ceremonious, it was full of a pleasure which gave it dignity. Get him away from his one hobby—a hobby that even beyond the ordinary engendered a supercilious aggression—and he was as simple as a child. His mind puttered about, continually, among roseate dreams and little witless faiths. He could never have known the meaning of guile, and at sixty his heart was all romance. He went through life as blindly as he had gone through Shakespeare, and as confidently; even his little affectations were so natural it would have been an affectation to subdue them. Now most of these peculiar, pedantic old gentlemen are at heart egotists, and encased in a panoply of conceit which our best directed rudeness cannot penetrate; but His Shakes was gentle, shrank before a slight, and must be approved by everybody.

The gossip about him ran as to whether or no he was a hypocrite; whether the Shakespeare matter were a pose—in which case it was not altogether without precedent—or a vitality, which seemed impossible. After a time he answered that question to our satisfaction, and this was the manner of the answer.

II

Our little-respected, much-liked star, Thomas Hartaling, was a gentleman who cared for nothing on earth but what he called "his fun." On account of his blond,

heavy, showy beauty and huge voice, he had a certain following all over the country and more especially in the one-night stands; but he would sacrifice business, reputation and even appearance to "his fun." He liked to break up serious scenes by guying, to play practical jokes on newspaper men, to tease his audience. Worst of all, he had an overweening partiality for the cup that cheers and too frequently inebriates. Now, his chief idea of "fun" was to make other men drink of that cup with him. It is so detestable a trait that I scarcely know how to account for it in that big, stupid, generous heart, but it was there; and almost to have incapacitated a man of his own company, a man who bore a share in a performance which raised or lowered Hartaling's own income, was to him the best joke in the world. Many and many a night he and his confederate would arrive at the theatre almost as the overture began, and would scuttle on to the stage with thick utterances and blotchy make-ups. But this was mainly before Freelman's day.

Now, during the latter part of the fall and well into the winter, Freelman had been keeping a pretty tight hold on Hartaling. He was a lean little man, with a keen, dry manner, and he had a wholesome influence over the big barbaric duffer who employed him. It was with considerable uneasiness that he left us on the 22nd of December and went on to await us in Dennerton, where we were to open with a Christmas matinee of "Hamlet" and play three nights. It was not his place to go, but Tommy Baker, the advance man, who had been released only the week before to go to a funeral, was now ill with the grippe, and Dennerton was a big place and worth working.

For a day or two Hartaling kept straight, and then, on Christmas Eve, he came to the theatre in the condition Sir Walter Raleigh engagingly describes as "moderate pleasant." Nevins was pleasant also, but scarcely moderate. The rest of us were virtuously cross. Every one was miserable at the thought of the night's traveling, for we were to leave on the midnight train and to reach Dennerton at six in the morning.

When we assembled in the cold, half-lighted depot, every one was present except Hartaling and Nevins. Reilly, the poor little stage manager, burdened with unsought responsibility, was fretting about the platform, when, ten minutes before train time, a boy arrived with a note, the contents of which Reilly was glad to share with us. It ran:

"Take company through to Dennerton. Nevins with me. Will follow by morning train.

"HARTALING."

I suppose the rest of the company thought as little about the affair as I did until noon next day. People who are doing one-night stands think as little as possible about anything. I entered the theatre at 1:30 on Christmas afternoon and found the atmosphere resolutely gay and little presents flying about among the women. Ten minutes later a vague and questioning agitation had crept into the dressing-rooms and made itself felt by scurryings and little silences. But the truth, when it came, was none the less a blow: Hartaling was not in town.

Gasp by gasp the story came out. Freelman and his subordinate had met the noon train in vain. Telegrams elicited the fact that Hartaling had not been to his hotel

all night. His whereabouts were still unknown. Nevins was also missing. And in the front of the house the biggest audience of the season was already seating itself.

About the time that the overture should have been rung in, Freelman, pale and with twitching lips, walked into the corridor between the dressing-rooms. He went from door to door with a single question, and the answer was invariably in the negative. Young Maltham, who played Rosencrantz, was already making up in lieu of Nevins for the ghost, but no one was ready with Hamlet. In a company of legitimate actors, where were old stagers ripe with experience, and young amateurs afire with ambition, it still seems incredible, but it was so. Presently Freelman came into my room, and found there old Mrs. Mathers in her street dress, myself, a couple of the other men, and Tess Telfair, ready for Ophelia, throned upon my trunk. "Rogers," he said, "can't you save an eight-hundred dollar house—can't you go on for Hamlet?" "Freelman," said I, "I could place any line in the repertoire if you started it for me, but I'm blest if I could get even rough perfect in Hamlet under a couple of hours."

"Couldn't you wing it, Roggie?" asked somebody. I shook my head. Freelman sucked his lips. One of the boys sniggered. "Why don't you go to His Shakes?" he said. "I'll bet he's up in every line."

Freelman looked up with his face working. Then he went suddenly out of the room. Miss Telfair started up with her hands clinched. "If they send on that old man," she declared, "I don't put a foot on the stage." She looked superbly angry; arrayed for the stage, she was a different creature from the listless lady of the ho-

tels. She was aglow with life and color, and something primitive and feminine shone in her and glorified her easy rage.

Freelman returned in a minute or two. "Cocks," he said, with his odd, cold excitement, "is going to play the part. I rely on all the ladies and gentlemen to assist him."

Tess looked at him. "You are going to make an apology to the audience?" she demanded.

Freelman's eyes shifted a little. "These are—er—holiday people, not regular theatre-goers. They don't—er—know Hartaling."

"You are going to make an apology to the audience, or I don't put a foot on that stage."

"Miss Telfair—" began Freelman through his teeth.

She continued, not more loudly, but with increasing vehemence: "I am not going to be made more ridiculous than I can help by playing opposite to any doddering old idiot that you may shove on because you can't find your star." She collapsed into her ordinary manner of private life. "Get another Ophelia if you want," she said.

"Oh! Tess, Teresa!" I cried, "don't be so unprofessional!" I dodged both her look and Freelman's and leaving them to fight it out, went to see after His Shakes.

I found him in what should have been Hartaling's dressing-room, surrounded by willing helpers. The poor old face had never looked so shrunken and the curls of the blond wig seemed to leer at him. He had black tights and sandals of his own, but Hartaling's great doublet hung around him in a manner that would have excited the derision of a guinea-pig. He looked so fool-

ish, frail and old that the great chain with the locket seemed to weigh down his shoulders, and yet, at that moment, he was the happiest man in Dennerton.

"You come most carefully upon your hour," he cried out to me. "I am glad that you have come. Will you walk with me to the stage?"

When we arrived there, we found that the gallant Tess had carried her point and Freelman was just then stepping before the curtain. Freelman's speech was very brief. He said that Hartaling's train had been delayed, that he would certainly be there for the evening's performance, and that the character of Hamlet would be essayed that afternoon by Mr. Regal Cocks. The usual kindly flutter of applause followed the name, but a man in the gallery crowed shrilly and raised a laugh. Cocks himself did not even hear it. Freelman added that the dissatisfied might claim their money at the box office, but very few went out. An audience once seated wants its performance, if not the better, the worse.

During the battlement scene, Cocks stood waiting for the change of set with his hand on my arm. He was nervous, not with apprehension, but with a heady, fine excitement, and his eyes shone gratefully through tears. He mumbled to himself a little, and then he said: "If at the end they should require from me a few poor words, it were not well to grudge them. I would dwell on my apprenticed years, on the dear drudgery, on my great love—" His voice broke, and when he spoke again it was with one of his sudden fine simplicities. "I do not blush at my emotion," he said, "this is the crown of all my life."

The inexorable slipping by of time went on, and the

moment came when from my wooden throne I looked down with an almost unmanning concern upon that doomed enthusiast. The moment he took the stage there went through the audience something too faint and indefinite to be called a titter, but yet a something, and that derisive. His cracked, melancholy voice intoned the simple opening lines without giving much offense, for they are not lacking who conceive of Hamlet as a Dead March in a monotone, but he no sooner reached "this too, too solid flesh" than a surprised smile arose, and at "The king, my father!" which Cocks gave in an amazing guttural outcry and with an extraordinary crackling of joints, a girl giggled aloud and two or three near her sniggered.

I kept out of Cock's way during his wait, but when his scene with the ghost came on my curiosity got the better of me, and I sat down in the entrance. I began to wish we had never entered upon this anxious expedient, but yet I had an interest in seeing it through. Of the scene itself I have no words to tell. Many a burlesque is not so funny, but the tragedy was what rose in my mouth and tasted bitter. For here was a man, old, weak and gentle, indifferent to his painful and ridiculous appearance, divesting himself of the last rags of dignity, strutting, mouthing, twisting and bellowing so that one blushed for him; for him, the devotee and martyr! The audience, even that audience, continually stirred and rustled, and at his entrance with the sword there was another burst of giggling. The curtain went down in quite a little gale of laughter and applause, and when I took His Shakes into my room to rest I found, from his triumphant tremor, that it was only the latter he had heard.

His skin was hot and dry, and he looked at me with burning eyes. "Ah!" he said, "they are coming my way! They needed but the guidance! At first they knew not how to take me, but now they are set thinking."

Their state of mind, truly enough, was changing. It grew from a jesting incredulity to the good-humored contempt of an American crowd; from that to a noisy but still half-amused disgust; and from that to anger—an anger to be reckoned with. By the end of the second act an ominous silence, a portentous common understanding, had spread among the audience.

When I went on for the third act I was aware of this. They were too tensely still, too polite; they were waiting. After our exit, I stood in the wing gripping Tessie's shoulder, uncomfortably eager for Cocks to enter, and, even as I watched him do so, came the advance-guard of the storm. He was greeted with a thunder of applause; above this rose the sound of men's voices crowing; in that corner of the gallery which I could see the crowers stood up and flapped their bent arms like wings. His Shakes bowed slightly. He disliked the interruption and was puzzled by its form, but he did not in the least recognize it.

"To be, or not to be—" he began. A perfect yell of "Not! Not! Nit!" stopped him. His Shakes looked around the audience with a deeply speculative glance. Even in the parquet men were laughing loudly, and some few were joining in the crows and cat-calls. Here and there a woman said, "Oh, don't!" but with smiling lips. His Shakes gathered himself together and went on amid a rain of jeers, of laughing comments and mocking advice. His conception of the soliloquy was an active one.

When he came to the phrase "No more," he gave it with a wild, whining bellow and a backward shudder that was almost a leap. And at that the audience rose en masse and in a deluge of cat-calls, hisses, whistles, crowings and derisive yells the Hamlet of Regal Cocks, nicknamed His Shakes, was drowned forever.

For at last he realized what all this was. Then in its sudden sharpness, the poor old face seemed really to fall in, and to leave unduly prominent the horror of his eyes —eyes so full of bewilderment, of shock and misery, of reproach and anguish and surprise. And if any had thought him other than a brave man, this was no time for them; he stood looking into that pit of howling faces, and he went on again with his lines. Ah! poor "His Shakes!"—destined to be undignified even in heroism! How he screamed, and shook with his screaming! Above the continued, growing tumult his voice, that was now a sharp treble, could occasionally be heard: "Flesh is heir to . . . To die, to sleep . . . what dreams—" He stopped suddenly with one hand on his breast and the fingers of the other trembling round his mouth. Reilly, with an insane loudness which did not carry, was calling, "Ring down! Ring down!" In front, the ordinary, good-natured men and women were turned for the moment to mere wild beasts, frenzied with their own wit and daring, and were determined to let nothing go forward. "Ring down!" yelled Reilly, dancing and waving his arms. His Shakes heard and motioned a negation. He lifted his head and in a bray that sounded above the din he shot out the words, "When we have shuffled off—" Again he stopped; again he put one hand to his breast and the other to his mouth. At

that moment Reilly's efforts succeeded; the curtain began to descend and, as it fell, His Shakes fell also and lay, a strange little crumpled heap, upon the stage!

Though confusion, uproar, reproaches, perplexity and terror may have been as regnant before the curtain as behind it, their subjects were not left long to doubt, nor, if their inclinations that way lay, to triumph. While people were still fumbling with their outdoor things, the edge of the curtain was moved back, and, with a sudden splendid gesture, Tess Telfair stepped before the audience. All in white, her heavy hair streaming over her shoulders, her beautiful bosom rising and falling with long puissant breaths, she was a figure to catch even the complacent, victorious brutality of that crowd, as well as its dazed distress, and set it gazing. With a single motion, confident and free, she conquered every look and spoke. "Ladies and gentlemen," she said, "men and women, if there are any among you who care to bear those titles, I am here to tender you an apology and to offer satisfaction. Your Hamlet, ladies and gentlemen, was turned into a farce, but do not think you shall be defrauded of your tragedy. The old man who offended you will never do so again—he is dying."

The audience drew in its breath with a sharp gasp.

"I have to say in his behalf that he was not a volunteer; that he went into this afternoon's trial at the command of his superior, as a soldier goes into battle. He was doing his best. He was old—he was ill. He did what he did that you might not be disappointed of your Christmas entertainment. I hope it may be a great satisfaction to you that you have killed him!"

She stood for a moment gazing at them with her great

impassioned eyes, and then she courtesied deeply and was gone. The hushed audience gathered up its wraps and slunk away. Once on the sidewalk, little groups spoke quietly, but with consternation. Here and there a woman's eyes filled with nervous tears. There was many a Christmas appetite spoiled that day.

III

Behind the scenes the last act of the tragedy drew simply to its close. The supporting company might be hysterical, but the chief actor was quiet enough, and had at last achieved "repose." He lay in his dressing-room upon a bed hastily improvised upon two trunks with skirts and draperies. He was quite conscious when the doctor came, and answered the grave "This is not your first hemorrhage?" with a shake of his head. "The third?"

The head of the aged Hamlet nodded indifferently, his eyes closed, and he drifted into a faint. The members of the company looked at one another. If he had talked an insufferable deal about Shakespeare, he had at least kept his own complaint out of the conversation.

The conscientious Miss Marsh spoke to the doctor in the hall, and his answer spread like the cold breath of a fog: "It is a question of a few hours."

It was not yet six o'clock. Most of the company went back to the hotel for something to eat. Tess, Miss Marsh and myself stayed with the sick man. I had supper sent in to us. Miss Marsh ate nothing; Tess and I touched little, except the cocktails. Miss Marsh sat in one corner, most of the time with her face buried in her hands. I

walked up and down the corridor outside and there was no noise but the sound of my own footsteps. Over everything there was an air of waiting.

About half-past six the backdoor man, stepping softly, came to me with a bouquet in his hand. "A lady and gentleman brought it," he said. "They hope Mr. Cocks was not so ill as was first reported, and they begged to assure him of their respectful sympathy." The respectful sympathy of the man's own manner was such that we could not manage to look each other in the face.

When I brought the flowers to Tess, she began to cry. It was the first time that I had ever seen her do any thing of the kind and I stood by embarrassed. She laid the fragrance of their soft bloom against his unresponsive face and, "Do you think he'll come to, a minute, Roggie?" she sobbed. "Just a minute, don't you think, to see his flowers?" And then suddenly, "Couldn't we make him believe—" She sprang up and fetched me her purse, "Get more. Get a lot. All our own people'll give you some money. Different bouquets, as if they came from strangers." And she hurried me away.

It was going on for eight when I returned. Tess had changed her dress and freshened her make-up, for the duty of presenting an unruffled front to the audience comes before all other duties whatsoever. I had made my purchases with an eye mainly to quantity, and the bare little room soon bloomed like a flower-show. But still there was that hush of waiting in it.

The night's performance was far gone before the mind of His Shakes came back to his world, to bid it good-bye. When, in response to such a rumor, I hastened to him

from my exit, I found him wide awake among his flowers; one bouquet in his hand and Tess kneeling beside him with his fingers in her comfortable clasp.

"All for me? All from—the public?" I heard him say.

"Yes, from the public—the educated people—lots of them have been asking after you. The ones that have been to the theatres in New York—they're ashamed of those barbarians!" she cried.

And at that the breath of Regal Cocks fluttered with eagerness; his wide eyes stared hungrily into her face. "You think then," he whispered, "it was—merely—their —ignorance? You think—if I'd played it—on Broadway—"

The actress looked me in the face, calmly and proudly. "Broadway would have known that you were great," she told him.

In the doorway behind me Hartaling loomed up, with Lawrence and young Maltham in his wake, and she challenged their attention, too, as she said, "That's the way the whole company feels, that you were great. Why, it's genius, isn't it, that the mob always hates? That's proof. You were the best Hamlet we ever saw, and it's been a lesson to all of us in acting Shakespeare. Isn't it so, boys, isn't it? Tom, you tell him."

"That's right, Cocks," Hartaling said. "The whole company says so. They're going to give me some points —bits of business, readings, you gave. You were great." Tess looked at Hartaling with tear-filled, grateful eyes.

But the pale face of His Shakes was alight with an ineffable happiness, a kind of noble complacency. In a weak and slow fashion that was still charged with some-

thing mannered and oratorical he began, "I endeavored to do justice to—" His voice failed, then with a little smile he breathed, "His Majesty shall have tribute of me." They were the last words we heard him speak.

And Tess just had time to read the news in the face of the hurriedly summoned doctor when she was called for the mad-scene.

THE TAMELESS TEAM

THE TAMELESS TEAM

THOUGH half-hour had been called, Miss Elsie Lee had not arrived when Miss Victoria Marsh stopped at the back door to get their key. That young lady, knowing all there was at stake, proceeded slowly upstairs and entered their dressing-room with a meditative step. It was no affair of Victoria's, but she was a fond friend.

The loveliness of the spring afternoon filtered through the smear of paint over the window-panes which was supposed to do duty for a curtain. Victoria flung up the sash and leaned out. She was confronted across the alley by blank walls of begrimed brick; the March mud lay deep between; at the alley's either end there was a faint clang of trolley cars and busy streets. But the air was full of spring, stirred with it, fainted with it, and whispered against human faces like a promise. Victoria moved uneasily, wondered at Elsie, looked up, lingeringly, toward the pale brightness of the skies. When she looked down again, it was because the alley was full of oaths and of noises that squashed and slid heavily. "The Tameless Team," she thought with amusement, even before she beheld the two fat, drowsy, piebald ponies that were placidly refusing to enter the theatre. Boards had been laid into a slanting run for them, men led them and men pushed, but the ponies, up to their ankles in mud, turned their mild, cowlike eyes upon their servants and stood still, "——— ——— the ———

dunderheaded hogs!" said the property man who was at their heads; "they never take a ——— step, ——— em!" Victoria smiled. It was Elsie's Ned who had called the title of "The Tameless Team" from an old programme—"The Tameless Team of Arab thoroughbreds driven by Miss Leonard in the third act are from the celebrated Muskewon Stables, Delevan." That was some years ago, when Miss Leonard had not been above advertising her play like a circus. She did not like Ned for unearthing that programme; she did not like Elsie. Victoria wished that Elsie would come.

The wish recalled to her the lateness of the hour; she slid off her black street skirt that it might be pinned across the window to shut out the daylight, and, as she mounted on the sill with her mouth full of pins, she perceived, turning the corner into the alley, the figure of a very young girl, darkly dressed, light of movement, pretty, with brown curls, and instinct with a small, shy, shabby elegance. That was Elsie. Victoria observed concernedly that Ned was not with her.

She turned on the gas and the electric lights and plunged with such vigor into her make-up that, when Elsie came in, she glittered with cold cream from her hair to her collar-bone, and her severity was a little oiled and softened by it. "Half-hour's been called!" she said.

Elsie came forward unheedingly. There was expectancy in her face, and excitement, and a vague fright, not unhappy. "He went," she informed her friend.

"Well," said Victoria, "so I supposed. He went—what then? Did he see Engle?—you'd better get dressed, it's almost fifteen minutes." Elsie began to

take off her things and hang them up. She moved a little as though she were dreaming.

"He saw Clive Jervis," she replied, "and Mr. Jervis introduced him to Engle. Mr. Jervis said that Ned had the right personality for the part, and, if he could act at all, he was the man they had been looking for. And Mr. Engle—he read Ned's letter of introduction to Mr. Jervis—Mr. Engle's going to be here in Philadelphia tomorrow night, anyhow, and Mr. Jervis is coming with him to see Ned in his part." She hung up her dress and sat down with her elbows on the make-up shelf; the gaslight gleamed softly over the whiteness and slimness of her young arms and throat, and, glimmering higher, disclosed the fact that her eyes were full of tears.

Victoria gave a long sigh. "Well, it's been worth it! Jervis has the complete say about the casts for his pieces; if he wants Engle to take him, Engle'll have to. And if ever Jervis sees Ned in this part—Well, it was worth a trip to New York, now that he's safe back. But I did worry for you, Elsie. If he'd spent the money for the trip and then hadn't seen Engle, or if he hadn't got back here, in time for the matinée—"

Elsie looked drowsily at her rouge-paw. "He isn't back," she said.

"What?"

"Not yet."

"Not *yet!*"

("Fifteen minutes," called the property boy down the hall; "fifteen minutes.")

"Then how did you know?"

"He telegraphed. I went to the station with him last night, and when we found that if he saw Mr. Jervis at

ten o'clock he could hardly hope to catch any train back here before the 11.30, he said he would telegraph so I would know how things went, before I left the house for the matinée. I—I had to know."

"Then," said Victoria, "he won't get into this city until two o'clock!"

"A little before two, and he isn't on till the second scene of the third act. You know how quick he is with his make-up. Of course I know, Victoria, that he oughtn't to have gone. I think Miss Leonard would be quite right to fine him, if she comes to know about it. But one has to risk a fine, doesn't one, when one's whole life depends on it?"

"I suppose you do. And that letter to Jervis was so strong—how far's the dêpot from here?"

"About ten minutes." Elsie stuck the tip of her little finger into her lip-rouge and began absent-mindedly to trace the curves of her lips with it. "Victoria," she said, "if he gets that part under such a manager as Engle—and you know if ever Mr. Jervis sees him in this piece he has got it—we'll be married at the end of this season." She looked down at her little engagement ring and up into Victoria's face as though she had announced a new heaven and a new earth. "We've got money enough saved, if we knew he had signed for next season, to have the whole summer to ourselves in the country. And you know a play by Clive Jervis runs nearly a whole season in New York, and we could have a flat, and I never need go away from him to act—unless I should just want to, Victoria."

"Suppose his train should be late?"

"Victoria!"

"Suppose his train should be late and he doesn't get here for the third act and Miss Leonard discharges him. Then when Engle and Jervis come on to-night they'll see somebody else in his part and hear he's been discharged for neglecting his business?"

"Victoria!"

"You know trains *have been late,* Elsie."

The brown grease-paint that Elsie was heating on the end of a hairpin melted over at this prospect and fell in a nasty blot on the fresh little starched ruffles at Elsie's breast. "There!" said Elsie, as though Victoria had aimed, throughout, at this disaster.

("Overche-w-er," screamed the property boy—doing duty for the stage-manager's invalided assistant, "Overchewer. Everybody down to begin.")

"Nearly two!" said Elsie. "His train's just about coming in."

Victoria stifled a "maybe." "You're pretty late yourself," she said; and she went over to Elsie and let down her little knot of curls and began pinning them into the way they ought to go.

She followed Elsie downstairs when the first act was called and they came upon Miss Leonard, large, opulent, and handsome, in the entrance. Miss Leonard was so angry that the very jewels on her breast spit fire, and she flung a scrap of conversation even to the two girls.

"What do you think of their bringing those ponies here at this hour?" she demanded. "To have people falling over them and making them nervous and feeding them nasty, dirty sugar till the third act—Mother's comforts!" she called to the ponies.

"I saw the men getting them in," said Victoria with great demureness.

Miss Leonard, still seething at the universe, went back to her dressing-room. The Tameless Team, from their dark and remote corner, regarded her with a mild surprise.

The curtain had gone up by this time and, as the act continued, it could not be denied that Elsie was playing with a distraught mind. At twenty-five minutes past two she was free to run upstairs again, and she went a flight higher than her room and knocked at Ned's door. No one answered her. "Ned," she called, and knocked again and pushed the door open. The room was empty. The street clothes of the other young fellow who dressed there hung on one wall, but Ned's were not there, only an old red sweater, a brigand's cloak left from another play and carried for an occasional curtain to the doorway, and his stage uniform. Elsie felt that pitiful sinking away of the universe with which our nerves acknowledge our helplessness. The worst had happened—the train must be late! The question was, how late? The hope contained in a mere number of minutes began to rise in her as she leaned against the door-frame and her drowning spirits caught at and floated with it. In the infinite divisibleness of time suggested, for instance, by railway tables, anything was possible; she remembered long jumbles of trains starting and arriving at 7.09 and 4.03; they showed at what odd minutes things could happen. A man need not be hours late because he was a little bit behind time. Ned's train might have come hurrying in fifteen, seventeen minutes after schedule, and he be now flying in a cab to save himself, or entering

the back door at that moment. She ran to the window, opened it and looked out, and had as sharp a pang of disappointment at the empty alley as though she had just heard Ned's chariot wheels.

She lingered in the window, for it was warm in the pale sunshine; the air was gently fresh, and yet after the hard winter it acted like a drug—a dim, inattentive kindness seemed to pervade the world, so that she could not believe the cruelty of its emptiness to be quite final, and the little birds that nestled in Elsie's heart began to sing again. She was drowsy with spring air and with nearly twenty-four hours of happy, high-strung and excited nerves, and all her hopes and fears, and her whole capacity for feeling began to take on a tone of unreality. It was like a dream that she should be standing there watching for Ned—Ned the protective, the independent, the capable and gay—there was something dreamy in the look of the dusty room, lighted by that strange mingling of gaslight and of sunshine, the make-up on the shelves showing crude and raw in so much glare, the oddly assorted clothes of differing times and countries dangling unconvincingly on the walls, the quiet intensified by fragments of sound from where, three flights below, there was so much warmth and mellow brightness, and strenuous, romantic action sweeping inexorably on, and round the whole that other world of the street noises, and the cool, indifferent sunny afternoon.

Victoria's voice sounded at the door: "Elsie—?" "Come on," she continued. "You come down and dress for the second act."

"He may come yet," said Elsie, following her; "He has lots of time."

"Oh, I guess so," Victoria answered, vaguely.

They met the stage manager on their own landing. "Oh, Miss Lee," said he, "is Mr. Farnum upstairs?"

"No," said Elsie. "I expect him every moment."

"Well, in case I don't see him, I wish you'd tell him Miss Leonard wants him not to anticipate his cue the way he does. He enters on her 'That is my answer' and it cuts right into her climax."

"That's the cue in his part," said Elsie. "It's always been done that way."

"Well, Miss Leonard says he shouldn't do it any more. He can take Miss Graham's next lines and enter on that. If you see him I wish you would tell him. He ought to be here now."

"I'll tell him," replied the girl, "I'm sure to see him."

She had begun to wake, and while she changed her dress two panoramas moved simultaneously and with equal clearness in her mind. She saw the nine years of Ned's apprenticeship, their obscurity, their drudgery, their poverty, and suddenly this great light upon the road, this door set wide—a New York opening and the favor of the great Engle; and she beheld upon the other side the emergency, the flight of time, Ned shackled somewhere, helpless, and the powerful Miss Leonard awaiting an occasion to destroy him.

"Second act," came the noise of the call-boy above the distant orchestral droning of "Reveries After the Ball" —"Second act."

When she reached the stage she found Miss Leonard feeding the ponies with her maid at her elbow. "A moment, please, Miss Lee," said the star, severely. "My stage manager tells me that Mr. Farnum isn't here?"

"He has a whole act yet," said Elsie, speaking the top of her thought.

"There was a notice put up on the call-board that every member of this company was to be in the theatre by seven-thirty for the evening performances, and one-thirty for the matinees."

She spoke as though Elsie were in some way guiltily responsible for this fact, and Elsie answered meekly, "As Ned isn't on till nearly four, he thought possibly it didn't include him."

"And I hope he won't come bursting on in the middle of my line any more," continued Miss Leonard, "but will wait for the cue as he was rehearsed. Of course—" [the ponies, as they chewed the apples she held out to them, spit and slathered over her hands, and as she talked she extended these to her maid to have them wiped]—"Of course he gets a reception, *or* the *situation* gets it, he's been talked about so much, and I have to stand around like a dummy on my own stage. Good God, Felice! Have you got pins in your hands? Oh, yes, that ring always does do that. And where is he, at any rate, at this time of day?"

"Why," said Elsie, "he went to the dentist's."

She uttered this astounding lie with the same bright airiness that was instinctive in the gentleness of her voice, the soft pride of her pretty movements. As to how it came into her head or out of her mouth she had no idea whatever, but the moment it was spoken she perceived its possibilities of extension. Ned overcome by gas, Ned fainting, unconscious and so blameless—and she caught her breath almost with a sob.

"Matinée day's a funny time to go to the dentist's,"

said Miss Leonard, and Elsie's leaping heart sank low again and acknowledged the justice of the suggestion.

"He's been every day this week," she declared, and gazed with an appalled and impersonal wonder at her own mendacity.

"Well, I hope he won't come on to my stage smelling like a hospital. Ahhn, angh, Naughty!"—to the greedier pony. "He'll get in here late, and come on with a blotchy make-up. Tell that super to go away! Tell him to go away. Orion will kick him!"

"Never in this mortal world," said Sammy Torrance, the young fellow to whom this last appeal had been addressed. "Neither Orion nor Jupiter ever did anything so forth-putting in their blameless lives." He cast a glance after the slowly departing super and said: "I am far more likely to kick him if he and his friends don't march a little faster in the Floral Fête. One of them is always under my feet when Ned Farnum enters."

"Something was the matter with my carriage-wheel last night," said Miss Leonard. "I thought we should never get across. The way Potter runs that stage I daresay he'll be delighted when we stick in the middle of it some night."

"Oh, but you won't do it, will you?" cried Sammy—he was the villain in the play. "You wouldn't spoil the only scene that the Tame—that Jupiter and Orion have got, by stopping before I stopped you and Ned had stopped my stopping you, just to gratify Potter, would you?"

Miss Leonard hesitated between the phrases. "You think you're funny, don't you?" and "I hope Mr. Farnum will be here for his entrance," and had just de-

cided upon the latter as the more dignified, when the stage manager bowingly attracted her attention.

"Your cue, Miss Leonard," said he, in a tone suggesting conscious iniquity in bringing such a circumstance to her notice.

As she swept away, the young villain laid a kind hand on Elsie's shoulder. "Keep up!" he whispered, "he'll get here."

"Oh!" cried Elsie, in gratitude. Tears of nervousness gathered in her eyes and overflowed.

With a "Have pity on your make-up!" he had to leave her in his turn, and she stood blotting the destructive teardops with her hand and trying not to shiver. This was becoming a life and death business, and the world was hard.

Her best bit of comedy came next, and she played it woodenly with her eyes behind the scenes. The theatre was one of those where the backdoor opens directly from the right hand of the stage onto the alley. The door hypnotized Elsie with the feeling that it might open at any moment to admit Ned. Here and there during the scene she could catch glimpses of it, and once or twice a draught across the stage told her that some one had tiptoed through it, though she could not see whom. She fretted at being on till the end of the act, but when the curtain fell she wished it might have stayed up a little longer. If he were upstairs, all was well with the world, but if he were not upstairs, if—She could hardly bring herself to mount the steps, the chattering, hurrying crowd jostled around her and pushed past, and she crept upward clinging to the baluster, a little hysterical and a little sick.

Suddenly, as she was starting up the third flight, she was aware of Victoria coming down, and Victoria shook her head. Elsie sat down on the stairs and piteously regarded the other girl. Her lips and her hands trembled, for a minute she could not speak, and when she could, she said, "What shall I do, Victoria? Victoria, what can I do for him?"

"I want to speak to you," said Victoria. She drew the girl back into their own dressing-room, pushed her into a chair and shut the door. "Elsie," she began, "you can't keep on like this. You can't let the third act go on unless Ned's here. You've got to tell the management!"

"No!" cried Elsie, and sprang to her feet and stood facing Victoria as though Victoria were Miss Leonard and the world.

"You've got to. The whole third act, the whole climax of the piece, depends on him. If they expected him to enter and he didn't, they'd have to ring the curtain down. They couldn't finish the piece. Why, they'd make it their business to kill him with every manager in the country, and they'd have a right to. It would ruin him!"

"He said he'd be here," persisted Elsie, "and he will. I know he will. He said so." All her pretty lady airs were rent and useless, and fluttered in her manner like torn laces. Her face was drawn and wild and trembled foolishly; it had a kind of childish obstinacy and a childish terror in it.

"And see here!" went on Victoria. "It's natural you should do all you can for yourself and Ned, Elsie, nobody knows what it means to you better than I do; but

after all, you're on the salary list of this company, and you sort of owe it to the whole thing not to let the performance go to pieces. It's only decent you should be honest about this."

"I'd rather be honest to Ned than to Miss Leonard," said Elsie.

"Honest to Ned! And what do you think Ned would say? I'll bet wherever he is, he's comforting himself thinking one thing. 'I'm not there, but Elsie is; she'll do her best for me. She'll make some excuse to Miss Leonard in time, and they'll fix up my understudy and get the piece through somehow, and very likely there won't be anything worse than a big row when I do get there?' "

The habit of quick changing is so old and so strong that all the time they talked the two girls had been undressing, and Victoria's last words came muffled through the skirt she was sliding over her head. The hook caught in her hair, she felt Elsie disentangle it, and when she had emerged from it Elsie was looking at her more steadily, and saying, "Miss Leonard's always hated him. But you're quite right, Victoria."

"That's a good girl. Now you hurry up. They'll be calling the act in a minute, and you're not half dressed. OH!" For at that moment the yowl of the property boy calling the third act sounded almost at their door.

"You dress!" said Victoria to Elsie, and sticking her own head out of the door, "Grady," she called to the property boy.

"Third act," continued that vocalist, "third—huh?"

"Grady, come here, I want to speak to you. Grady, won't you please stop calling the act and run down to

Mr. Potter and tell him not to ring up—not to ring up on any account till Miss Lee's dressed. Tell him to have another overture."

"What's the matter with 'er?" asked Grady.

"She's got to tell Miss Leonard something very important. She's got to!"

"Aw, well," said Grady, "act's called—third act."

"Oh, hush! See here, Grady, Mr. Farnum's not—not here!"

"Hey? Oh, God!" said Grady, and they could hear the haw-haw of his ill-judged mirth as he hurriedly cluttered down the stairs.

Still hooking and buttoning, Elsie ran after him with Victoria in her wake. On the first landing the girls were stopped by the sound of the curtain-music and the next instant they beheld Grady ascending toward them, spreading out his arms and widening his features in derision and dismay. "Act's on!" said he.

It was the irrevocable. Elsie put her hands over her face.

"Not my fault," said Grady. "I seen her and Potter in the entrance and I hollered to him, 'Mr. Potter, don't ring up!' She was lettin' out her jaw on him, about the band not bein' loud enough in the Flawral Fete, an' he didnun hear me. 'Mr. Potter,' I says, an' just then he gave the signal an' up she goes."

"Thanks, Grady," said Elsie. She put her hand on his sleeve as she went past him, and he turned quietly and followed her.

At the same time a super who had started upstairs stopped at the sight of her and said, "They're calling you, Miss Lee."

"Miss Lee! Miss Lee!" cried Mr. Potter. "Hurry, Miss Lee!"

"Where's Miss Leonard?" said Elsie. "I must see her. Ned's—"

"Go on! the stage is waiting!" and Mr. Potter in his most justifiable wrath gave her a little push. The young fellow who played opposite to her was already glancing off the entrance, and she went forward to meet him and spoke her line.

Grady, who was watching her beside Victoria, whispered: "It'll finish Farnum with the management."

"Yes. Wait! I'll—who's Mr. Farnum's understudy?"

"Johnson, he's home with the grip. One o' the boys is goin' on for him."

"We can't do anything then," said Victoria, and she turned and went to walking by herself behind the backdrop.

Meanwhile, Elsie, after her first speech, had turned her back on the audience and whispered to young Maltham, her partner in the comedy scene, "Play it slow—I beg of you!" she added.

The bewildered gentleman endeavored to comply, but it is not so easy to play a scene slowly which one has carefully learned to play fast, and, with every will to oblige, the boy found himself speaking nimbly. Not so Elsie. She was like a person in the first stage of intoxication, when the mind is miraculously clear, quick, and light, full of resource, deft of accomplishment, and courageous in a singular detachment from the world. She invented "business," and did it with ease; she spoke slowly, she made tremendous pauses, and yet she was so

pretty and her face was so bright with laughter, and she filled in her stops with motions and grimaces so arch and cunning that the audience scarcely knew how the scene dragged. The poor young man stumbled after her in bewilderment; behind the canvas-drop of their little front scene the "Floral Fête" was being set with bumps and clamor, and the sound of pounding ropes that would not lash, and all the time that Elsie coquetted with her lines she seemed to herself to be only a sense of hearing, which listened for a footfall and the closing of the stage door. She believed that she would be able to hear him, that she would know if he came in; she was conscious of nothing but her listening, and the color blazed up under her rouge and her eyes were bright as fever.

Miss Leonard came out of her dressing-room and said to Grady, "Ned Farnum come yet?"

Grady looked her blankly in the face and said: "Yes'm." When she turned away he put his tongue in his cheek, but he rolled his eyes in a terror that could not have been wholly simulated.

"What's the matter with that girl?" said Miss Leonard. "She's dragged that scene three minutes." And just then Elsie, able no longer to put off the inevitable, made her laughing exit with the young man; the dark change pounced upon the house, withdrew again and disclosed the Floral Fête.

This was heralded as among the most elaborate, as it was certainly among the prettiest, of stage settings. The scene represented a park in some old town whose foreign quality was indicated by palms and white umbrellas. Besides the painted drops and properties, trailing vines,

potted plants, and stands of bright-colored foliage were everywhere, a crowd in gay summer fineries promenaded and chattered in a manner ingenuously suggestive of a comic opera, and a band, composed of all the musicians in the orchestra, sat in a bandstand draped with pink bunting, and faced across the stage, the judges in their platform decked with flags and flowers. Nightly some few hired horses, pranked out just prettily enough and drawing carriages filled with extra girls, defiled across the stage; nightly, after an appreciable interval, Jupiter and Orion, glossy and combed and crimped, half hidden in white roses and streaked with silken reins, came ambling to their triumph; they dragged a little basket-phaeton above which swayed two eagles bearing in their beaks a canopy of the American flag, and the eagles, the flag and, seemingly, the phaeton were made of flowers; nightly, in this bright bower, Miss Leonard sat erect, all satin and lace and gems, her reins in one hand, her useless blossoming parasol in the other; and nightly, by her side, in meeker organdie, Elsie, as the ingenue and friend, made herself as small as possible.

Then would the judges rise inthralled and, being seemingly partial to the Stars and Stripes, award to this equipage the crown for the best decorated carriage. Then would the band descend and place itself at the head of Jupiter and Orion, and to the tune of the "Star Spangled Banner," the conquerors would sweep once and a half around the stage.

In the middle of the second turn, as the carriage reached the center, out would come the villain clutching at Orion's bridle, calling upon the fête to cease, and falsely denouncing as an adventuress and a political spy

the lovely heroine, an American lady of an innocent but clouded past. Then Ned Farnum, in his American naval uniform, would push through the crowd and burst into the defense of that wronged lady, and thence would the scene sweep to its finale, Miss Leonard and Ned carrying all before them, and the leading man, up in his dressing-room, denouncing to himself "these 'bits' that come on and hog everything!"

Now, as usual, as the round of applause for the prettiness of the stage died away, Miss Leonard stepped into the phaeton and Elsie crawled in after her and sat down.

As long as she lived she would remember the sickness and the terror of that time, for she was not courageous, and she had inwardly committed herself to a desperate expedient. She was going to take Ned's old cue, stand up in the phaeton and faint. She bitterly reflected that if she should fall out of the side of the phaeton and break her neck, it would be the best thing possible; at the same time the prospect seemed a trifle dolorous. In a side light of hysteria she saw Miss Leonard having her swept out of the way like a dustheap and pushing forward with the scene; in any event she knew she should do the thing badly. She saw herself, with her eyes glued together, trying to deceive the doctor, and she saw herself found out, with her engagement lost as well as Ned's; but through these dismal counsels she held fast to the idea that it was one more chance for Ned, that it was all she could do for him, and she felt the phaeton move forward into the familiar scene, and kept her hold upon her resolution.

All went as usual. The gay little equipage received

its customary tribute, Miss Leonard smacked gently at the Tameless Team to quicken their pace, and the Tameless responded by going a little slower and ogling down at their plump feet with their huge sleepy eyes. The judges were as enthralled as ever, the crown was bestowed, the phaeton began to creep forward again on its triumphal course, with Miss Leonard bowing to the plaudits of the stage crowd, and Elsie, an inert mass of ruffles and misery, cowering beside her. Step by step poor Elsie was being drawn nearer to the abyss, bit by bit the ground was being broken from beneath her feet, and when the carriage stopped before the onslaught of the villain she knew the last dear barrier was down and she began to gather in her skirts with a trembling hand, preparatory to her leap into that gulf of terror. She saw Victoria, anxious-eyed, sitting on a bench; she heard the voice of the villain, oddly weak and nervous in his knowledge and his kind dismay; she saw him fling out his arm in denunciation without his usual calculated care, and she saw it strike against the cornet of a man in the band who was standing too near to him. The man, in the unapproachable apathy of an "extra," had been gaping into space, the cornet flew out of his hand and landed with a surprising clangor at Jupiter's very feet; the horror of the noise reverberated in Elsie's heart as she closed her eyes, clutched her skirts and forced her stiffening bones to rise when the heroine should reply, and at that moment, as though by an upheaval of the solid earth, she was thrown back upon the seat, swept round in a strange, grinding turn and swung against the side of the phaeton, with the phaeton itself whirling toward

the footlights. Fate and the cornet had done what neither blows nor bribes had yet achieved, and the Tameless Team had quickened its pace at last.

The ponies were headed straight for the audience. In one moment of pandemonium, strangely brief, strangely prolonged, Elsie beheld the crowded faces before her, paling, screaming, rising and huddling into one blur of terrified people, heard shouts before and behind her, had a strange bewildered notion of the blackness of the auditorium and of the intervening band of glare, felt herself quakingly, exhilaratingly aware that even in this uneventful, mortal life the old, impossible bugaboo was to be realized, that the ponies were really going to go over the footlights, that, good heavens! they were going over them —and in the same instant with a terrific, joggling jar she was arrested upon the brink of this gulf as upon that of the other, and the phaeton, having crashed into the footlights, remained there tipped a little forward, while the hind hoofs of the ponies, who were suspended by their harness, threshed in madness on the floor of the orchestra and knocked the musicians' chairs to splinters.

Elsie sat there in the phaeton and gaped down at the ponies in a shaken bewilderment and relief. She saw the broken carriage-pole sticking up out of the ground into which in some way it had jammed itself, but the amount of luck which the fact contained was lost upon her, and indeed it was almost in the moment of their pause that Miss Leonard ejaculated "Out!" and pushed her smartly from the phaeton. People were already round as she scrambled to the stage, for the scattered Floral Fête had turned again toward the scene of action, and Victoria had already gotten hold of Elsie's hand when the voice

of Miss Leonard pierced and shrilly commanded the hubbub; "Don't you hurt those horses! Don't you touch 'em!"

The people in the audience were now beginning to realize that they were not going to be trampled to death; those who had left their seats returned slowly toward them, the gallery boys shouted advice, a woman gave way to hysterical laughter and some few men came speeding down the aisles bent on assistance.

Of these last Miss Leonard took stock in a brief survey and then turned an eye upon the stage. "You, Grady!" she called, "you and Jake help me—Here!" to an amateur assistant at the orchestra rail, "there's a chair, there, under the box. You come into the orchestra and hold it for me—hold it!" Whereupon, with a wholly matter-of-fact display of white silk stockings, she climbed briskly to the ground.

Jake and Grady followed her, but it was she who came the quickest to the closest quarters, who cut straps and unbuckled them with the deftest hand, and threw her rapid orders here and there with a decisive tongue. The two shirt-sleeved stage hands and their more decorously costumed assistants made an obedient group about Miss Leonard's tall, plump figure in its satin and jewels and lace and with the crown of the Floral Fête tumbling askew in her bleached hair. When they drew back from her she held the trembling, shivering Orion by his bridle, and, in the hands of Jake and Grady, the still rearing Jupiter stood close behind.

"You must all keep quiet and keep back while I lead 'em out," she called to the audience; and it was she who coaxed Orion from the orchestra and led him up the

aisle and out into the street. Grady and Jake followed cautiously with Jupiter, and in the tense stillness of their exit Elsie heard the bang of the stage door and the sound of a footstep racing up the stairs.

Miss Leonard came back smiling and wiping her hands on her skirt. She regained the stage by a door behind the boxes, and she said to the stage manager, who was gasping over this most disturbing incident of his career: "You'd better ring down a minute, Potter."

It was only for a minute. The phaeton was already being rolled away, one of the hired rigs with its mere livery-stable horse was brought back onto the stage, and Miss Leonard and Elsie got into it. "Oh, Ned!" cried the tempest-tossed heart of Elsie. "Oh, Ned, hurry, hurry!"

Ah, but there was applause and plenty of it when the curtain rose and the audience beheld Miss Leonard, to the tune of "The Star-Spangled Banner," once more driving round the stage! Once more the villain stopped her progress and accused her, and once more she replied. Just then there was a little movement near the entrance, and as Miss Graham, the villainess, gave the new cue, the crowd was pushed aside, and, in his American uniform, with his bright, boyish, adventurous look of the young rescuer, Ned Farnum stepped upon the stage and spoke his first line.

That night, when Victoria came downstairs for the third act, she found Ned and Elsie feeding finely sliced carrots to the Tameless, who had sunk once more into apathy. Victoria smiled grimly.

"Well," said she, "it seems about the least you can do for them."

IN AUGUST

IN AUGUST

WESTON toiled up the long stairs of the boarding-house, through halls whose dingy twilight seemed like benevolence after the torrid street. Several open doors gave glimpses of gay, untidy rooms; past these Weston cautiously, morosely skulked. He was afraid of being haled in to rest and cheer, and he had no stomach for the indifferent, kindly pity of strange actors—actors who had work, actresses who were strong and well and not married to unsuccessful, worthless husbands. When he reached the threshold of that fourth-floor back where his wife would be smiling to him from the sofa, he stopped outside the door, got his breath, wiped his face, and called up a nervous, unconvincing cheeriness of aspect.

But she was, after all, asleep. He assured himself of this by a second glance; noticing that the sun from the open window was beating on her face, he crossed the room and pulled the blind a little lower before he dropped into a chair and sat staring at her as if she had been incarnate fate. It seemed to him that she looked not so much ill as thoroughly and absolutely tired of the world. This fatigue, this indifference, made him almost afraid of her. He told himself that she had no grasp of life, that she would let it slip from between her fingers with as little interest as she had the open letter which had fallen beside her lounge. He felt himself

shiver in the hot room; then he felt the fever, the stifled threatening of the day, more appallingly than before. In a passion of unreason he cursed the house and the inhuman creatures in it who had let her lie there so near the window in the streaming heat; his glance strayed from the dropped letter to the envelope which lay farther along the carpet in front of the door; he thought that probably a breeze had blown away the envelope as it closed the door, and then he cursed them that they had let her lie there in a draught. The whole miserable universe was conspiring to take her from him!

He had been all day at the agencies. His conscience, since they had begun to owe the landlady, had made rather a point of his not being at home for lunch; but he had forgotten his appetite, at any rate, in that search for work. He had been searching for it so long! He had worn out the whole summer climbing those stairs, hanging in those doorways, trying to crack jokes across the damnable wire fences behind which sat enthroned those oracles of life and death who held close behind their complacent lips the secrets and the favors of the managerial gods. He had been prowling there in the early spring when the gaily dressed crowds were threaded every now and then by brisk celebrities; he had seen the crowds melt and vanish in the summer heat, gone to Europe after clothes, to farmhouses to economize, to summer stock companies, not one of which wanted Weston—though they seemed to want plenty of other people a good deal like him, except that they were apt to be less competent and could not be had so cheap. He saw the time when, during the long fainting days, almost nobody came into the offices, and he was left face

to face with the relaxed awfulness of the agents, who took to cigars and newspapers, or to tatting, according to their sex. And now the time had come when the crowds were back again, and once more the managers threw their handkerchiefs, and once more Weston stood, unchosen, in the mob. It was the last stage and the worst. He had been welcome for his company in July's empty offices where, as he told his wife, he had consistently practised that engaging motto for the shy: "Assume an easy and familiar manner, especially with ladies." But now with the advance of the autumn business, the rush and tug of managers who wanted actors and actors who were wanted, Weston was forgotten; when he endeavored to recall himself, he became something of a bore. In the twentieth century even oracles must eat, and, though you may have the friendliest wishes toward him, there is no profit to anybody in sending a man to see managers whom managers do not want to see!

He and Grace had not foreseen quite such a future when, five years ago, she had flown in the face of Providence and married him. It was her father (who had kept a candy store in Milwaukee, next door to a theatrical boarding-house) who had shown himself astonishingly alive to the situation, and had accurately and enthusiastically pointed out to her the disadvantages of marrying an actor. What! one of that idle, extravagant, shiftless lot, a man who would lie in bed late and want his breakfast brought up to him, who would bring beer into the house in a pitcher, and play pinochle for money! Had he anything to support a wife on? Now that she had got herself fairly established in her profession,

lucky for her if he did not hang around out of work half the time and expect her to support him, yes, or take her money, as like as not, and spend it on other women! At least wait till she was twenty-five, the family council had implored, before she married and began having children and dropping out of her business for a year or two at a time—that was the sort of thing that did for you on the stage! Weston's whole tired figure gave a twitch; he seemed to feel his son's little body crowding on his heart, the bits of fingers creeping and searching over his face. They had had to send the child back to Grace's family when typhoid had ravaged the mother in the winter that was past: Weston could not but suppose that it would have found her a less easy victim if she had ever been really well since the baby came. Her people had been very kind about the baby; they could not blame Weston for the necessity of parting him from his mother since other persons beside married actresses are subject to typhoid; at the same time it all seemed to them only another mesh in that web of dreariness and failure in which they felt he had entangled her. Up to the very present Weston had never failed to send back a little money for the boy's expenses, but that was no longer possible. The child was almost nothing to him as yet, in comparison with the mother, but he could not have known for nearly two years that helpless life of his first son and not feel the sting of ceasing to be its providence. Justly or unjustly, he saw himself with the eyes of men who could at least pay their families' board bills; he thought of one fellow in particular who used to hang around Grace in Milwaukee, but who had married since then and whose

wife, from her new automobile, had nodded condescendingly to Grace the last time they had met. He wondered if Grace sometimes remembered whose automobile that might have been; he himself remembered very well how he used to guy the fellow to her! His heart sank now with shame, and yet with a touch of the old stupid jealousy, and he had such a sense of hatefulness in himself that there seemed no distance great enough to divide him from her. He moved his chair a little closer to the couch.

The hand of the dollar clock on the mantlepiece pointed to five. To-morrow would be Saturday, and most of the offices would close at noon. Practically another week was gone, and at this time of year that meant another week nearer to the gulf. He went over to himself the managers he had seen lately: Melville, the romantic star, who had thought Weston too tall to play with him; Jervis, the author, who had really wanted him for "Captain Bryce," if only he had been large enough for a guardsman; Hendricks, who saw him in reference to the juvenile with Kate Erskine, but who had confided to a friend that he would make her look like his grandmother; the Einslers, who had been favorably impressed with him, but who hedged on hearing him ask a small salary and feared to trust him with the part; and Lister, who had sent for him, but who, having employed him when he first went on the stage, refused with indignation to pay him anything beyond the meagre salary of that time. He had gone back to Lister the next day, but the part was filled. He would never have let the miserable chance slip in the first place if he had not been filled with hope by Ted Chesney's negotiations with

Joseph Lemuel, if Ches had not encouraged him by the wild fantasia of getting him a job in those exalted regions. "If he comes to my terms," Ches had declared, "I shall have charge of the whole show, of every nail they drive on this side of the footlights. It's that for me, or nothing." What a fool he had been to suppose that a good fellow like Chesney would ever get any such terms, that Melville would endure tall men about him, that Jervis would prefer art to weight in the presentation of a guardsman! Chesney's contingent offer had been his dearest hope; he took out of his pocket, reread and tore into bits yesterday's note which told him that the deal with Lemuel was off. Well, one thing was clear; chance after chance, they had all slipped out of his hands like water. It was all very well to make excuses for each individual instance, but if he dared look in the face the testimony of the whole summer one thing was certain; whatever else he was he was not desirable.

But why? That was what he could not help tormenting himself with—why? What was it? He put aside at once all question of his ability. In that he did not doubt himself, and, if he did, he had only to observe the work of other men in higher places, to know that it was not their ability which had put them there. Was there something wrong with him then, personally? Was there something distasteful in his appearance, in his manner, differentiating him from acceptable heroes and lovers? For a long time now he had searched his face, observed his carriage, hated his own smile, his own voice, suspected in every stirring of his personality some peculiar and invidious distinction. And yet, if that were so, it was one in which Grace also shared. She, too,

when she was able to go out, had looked for work and unavailingly—she who was sweet to see and of so appealing a delicacy and charm! Or had he grown incapable of judging her, and was she, too, mysteriously marked for failure? Were they cut off from the rest of mankind, they two, and left standing upon some mysterious plague-spot? He told himself that this was a delirium of weariness, but the delirium remained.

The strangeness of it was not so much that they could get nothing good to do as that they could get nothing at all. It had not always been so, and yet they did not ask for so much now as they used to do; their fine spirit about not taking engagements except in the same company had been broken, and he remembered old scruples, fastidious standards of independence or loyalty, which had sometimes stood in their way and which now seemed to him like silly, sentimental dreams. He remembered a big chance which he had once given up because the star he was then playing with would not release him. She had had no contract to hold him by, and now he moved his lips in a sick derision of that honesty. In the future, if there were such a thing, he and Grace would take what they could get, and hang on to it like other people. If there came to be something lost between them in a mutual faith and pride, at least they would know where their next meal was coming from. He told himself, looking dryly with his hot eyes upon the thinness of his wife's face, that he was willing to pay any price, and then he saw that he was already paying all he had. He realized with a sharper sickness than before that in his desperate determinations he was no more powerful than a child determining to be a pirate, and

that whatever he might do he was no more able to buy a little ease, a breath of peace, for her than to go back and leave her on the pleasant path where he had found her. He started up with a restless shudder, and going over to the further window leaned there frowning down into the dreary litter of the far-away backyards. He asked himself if he were an admitted failure in this business; come now, what was the next move? Was there any other business that he knew, any trade which he understood, any chance which, if it were offered him, he would know how to take? Somewhere in the neighborhood people of thrift and foresight were getting in coal. Would anybody trust him to drive a coal-wagon? His whole soul sickened after manual success, and cried out against genteeler accomplishments, the unmanly arts of pleasing—in which, he must suddenly remember, he had wholly failed to please. But along middling lines then, in shops and offices, was he capable of nothing? Well, fairly capable of a good deal—perhaps, with a little time, a little opportunity and direction, all the things most lacking in this crisis. But to put out his hand securely and seize something—no, nothing in the world. The world, he saw, was too big and hard for him and Grace, for life or death they did not count in it. The gorging, struggling masses of success, the whole blind, opulent, and crushing earth rolled down upon them, rolled over them, and he had no strength at all to shield her.

He had now for sometime been absently gazing at the letter which had dropped from Grace's hand, but it was only at this moment that he perceived it to be a single sheet of paper with some kind of business heading. With an agonizing pang of hope he picked it up. "The

Elmside Dairy—21 quts."—it was the milk bill, and it had not been paid for three weeks! He recalled the doctor's words: "At least a quart a day, Mrs. Weston, if you are to gain as we wish." Three weeks! A dollar and sixty-eight cents! He had still four dollars from his watch, which was the last thing they had had to pawn. A dollar and sixty-eight cents out of four dollars—he would have to stop the milk! But that was impossible—she needed it! Was it really true that she, Grace, could not have what she needed, when it cost only fifty-six cents a week, and that rich concern was dealing it away, day after day, to multitudes? It was quite true. They had cut out their evening car rides a long while ago; last week they had decided to indulge in no more breaths of air on the ferry—he caught sight of her last bottle of medicine on the wash-stand; it had cost sixty cents only a few days ago, and it was almost gone! Weston felt himself beginning to grapple with a mingled fright and anger at the absurdity of their affairs. Why, she must give up everything; after all that he had contrived for her she must slip back again and get worse, and this time nothing could be done to help her, though she should actually suffer! It seemed unbelievable. He had pitied such things often enough when he had heard them about other people vaguely called "the poor," but about themselves it was a thing that stopped his breath. He saw clearly, for the first time, to the actual end of his four dollars, and realized that sum to be all that remained between them and want. Not another penny in the world—What were they to do then? My God! What was to become of them! The blank horizon gaped at him.

On the instant he was shaken by one of those waves of panic which summer in the city sends upon human nerves to break and drown them. His spirit was ground and beaten to pieces in that fierce rush of horror; his sense of common life deserted him; he was blind with fear; sick and shaking, his whole being one shrieking pandemonium of hysteria, he sat staring at his wife and knocking with his knuckles on his open mouth. "Oh! oh! oh!" kept on the alternate pound and flutter of his heart. "What is to become of us? What is to become of us? What shall I do? What shall I tell her? When the time comes that the money is all gone what shall I say to her? Where shall we go? What will they do with us?" Struggle as he would there was no way out, nothing that he could see between them and a misery beyond death. Death, indeed, how easily people talked about that, as if it were quick and reliable and met with overnight! It was not death he feared, but the length of its approach which was—impracticable. There must be something to be done—something—there must be—other people did things—money was made—but oh, how, how? What to try? Where to turn? What next? His heart was gasping open and shut like the gills of a dying fish, but the dollar clock ticked on, indifferent, like fate, and no other answer sounded through the frenzied whimper of his brain. He began to crave some signal of human nearness, he felt as if he must go mad indeed if some one did not speak to him and prove him still capable, at least, of communication with his kind. And suddenly he wondered at Grace's sleeping so soundly, so long. He had been at home now for sometime and she had not moved; it seemed to him

as if she had not breathed. All the jangling nerves in him were stricken quiet by a single fear. If she—He put out his hand and touched her; her skin was moist and warm, she sighed and stirred a little. And at that he lost all grip upon happiness or unhappiness, submerged in a kind of terrible relief. He remained bent forward, shuddering, and after a time, when he began to recover consciousness, to rise to the surface, he found himself holding desperately to some idea, some plank of safety.

This idea turned out to be that he had been making a fool of himself for nothing, that no matter what happened Grace was provided for, that she could always go back to her people. It was an abhorrent thought, but he clung to it, still quaking, it was true, but reassuring, quieting himself. Why, what a fuss he had been making! What was all this deathly fear he had been drowning in? She was not going to die, she was not going to want, what had he been thinking of? She was not going to sink, here, with him, no, no; she could go home to decency, security. He began to breathe evenly, he sat up and wiped his face and head, that were all cold and drenched with the sweat of nightmare. Why, that was it, that was the way! He would write to-night to Grace's father and ask for money for her ticket home, and as soon as she was gone he would give up the room. A man alone could always manage somehow until—Well, he would try; there might be something, somewhere, that he could do. He got slowly to his feet and began to walk up and down, gravely, and with judicial calm, sobered from having touched the depths. God knew it would be hard to tell her that she must go

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home! That was a thing she had always kept out of her mind. Poor Grace! poor girl! They would give her enough to eat and a place to stay in, in the bustling, strident little house, but they would make her very unhappy. He knew the family circle well, its thrift, its sound, comfortless comfort, its unresting, cheery contempt for weakness, for failure. When they were not confiding their sentiments about him to Grace she would still hear them confiding in the neighborhood, and she would have to go to them for car fare, for postage stamps. His child, too, and his wife! No wonder people were contemptuous of him. Contempt for himself had long been in him like a poison, and yet within him, too, something rose to combat that contempt. He had done his best, he would do his best still. She would understand. He looked long at her pale face and told himself that he had loved her as faithfully and given her as true a joy, as if he had been able to serve her better. He took a little comfort, but he was too tired and too sad for hope. He saw her whole nature shrink from the bitter resignation which was growing in his heart, and he said aloud, "I can't help you." As he spoke his glance fell again upon the envelope which lay face downward on the floor, and this time he saw that it was not an envelope only, but an unopened letter.

He read the signature first, and then in a kind of apathy the whole note, from which, presently, particular phrases began to stab through him in flashes of great joy—"At the eleventh hour . . . all O. K. . . . Lemuel perfectly agreeable . . . to sign contracts . . . office, ten to-morrow . . . Chesney."

The twilight deepened and deepened in the quiet

room. Weston sat down on the floor beside the sofa and nestled a hand among the folds of his wife's dress.

She stirred again, opened her eyes, and smiled drowsily down at him. With a long, light breath she moved her hand in a little gesture of welcome, and reassured by his presence, she let her lashes droop again. He continued to sit there in the soft evening, silently waiting to give her this news when he should wake her, and rested his cheek against her skirt.

THE PRINCESS ROSALBA

"MY dear Bob," said Miss Austin, "you should try managing a circus, not a Pinero actress. I don't know what I can do for you that is more sensational than to lose my jewels!"

Her young business manager stopped in his wrathful promenade up and down her dressing-room, and favored her with a tremendous frown. "Is this a time to joke?" he said. He turned imperiously to the grave personage at the door. "Tell it again," he said. "And be careful. Don't miss a point."

The personage cleared his throat. "I went back in the carriage, sir, as directed, to fetch Miss Austin's necklace. When I reached the hotel I went to the desk for the box to be gotten out of the safe. The clerk was there, and another person, and there were some persons whom I scarcely observed, leaning upon the desk. I presented Miss Austin's order, and when the clerk handed me the box, I unlocked it with Miss Austin's key, in full view of those present. The box was packed with pebbles, empty pill-boxes and such trifles. Miss Austin's ornaments had disappeared. And I drove here to report, Mr. Daley."

"You see!" cried the business manager, waving an accusing hand at his principal. "Not even an advertisement in it! Nothing! A bald, impossible state-

ment. Not a clue, not an incident! nobody will believe it! They will say it is a fake!"

"My dear Robert," said Miss Austin, "try to remember that it is not my fault. I would have lost my jewels more romantically for you, if I could." She turned slowly toward the personage and regarded him gravely and softly, tapping on her mouth with her long fingers. "When you unlocked the box, Thomason, the key turned as usual? You do not think the lock had been tampered with?"

"No, madam, quite as usual."

"And no one had asked at the office for my box, since I saw you put it there, myself, last night?"

"No one, madam."

"I packed it myself," she said, turning to the manager. "Hannah was busy with a ruffle I had stepped on, and I always like to handle jewels, so I put them away myself. I drove home with the box in my lap, and I gave it to Thomason at the hotel door. I saw the clerk put it in the safe."

"The hotel is liable," said Daley. "It's a clear case."

Miss Austin made a movement of distaste. "It is terrible to have it narrowed to the clerks. An indefinite criminal doesn't matter, but when it comes to people one has seen—Did they examine the other things in the safe? Were they intact?"

"As far as could be seen just then, madam. There was even an envelope from that music-hall person with some money in it, not a large sum, quite undisturbed, madam."

"That music-hall person?"

"She was there, madam, and counted it. She said she was sorry your jewels were gone, as she had wished to see them on you to-night, madam."

"To-night? oh, yes. If you mean Miss Montresor, Thomason, kindly call her so."

"Yes, madam. And she does look above her station, certainly, madam. A very well-appearing young woman—"

"You sent her a box, of course, Bob," Miss Austin interrupted.

He nodded. "Higgins, her representative, wrote for one. She has had some kind of a kick-up with the people at the Orpheum, and they've put an injunction on her, so she's not dancing at all. How many stones in that necklace of yours, Mary?"

"Thirty.—And they had nothing whatever to say at the office, Thomason?"

"Nothing to signify, madam."

"Well, they're saying something by this time, I bet. I guess the catechism's easy to what those detectives are springing on 'em by this time. I guess your lawyer will have something to say to them about breakfast time, that'll take away their appetites. And now when the fellow gets here from the police force, Mary, it'll be Hoffman or Harkinson, one of their best men, and I want you to smile at him, and treat him right, and hearten him up a little, as though he was one of those little devils of newsboys, or waiters, or washerwomen that you always lay yourself out for. It's really nothing against a man that he's got influence,

you know." He looked quizzically at her with his shrewd and charming smile.

"Very well, Bob," she said. "And certainly it has to be left to the police. And I am afraid it will have to get into the papers."

"Into the papers! *Get* into the papers! You bet there isn't going to be anything else in the papers! I'll have headlines that'll knock the public right between the eyes. If there ain't a story in the thing, I'll make one that'll send up the price of padlocks. I'll have this whole town seeing diamonds in its sleep. I'll have all the boarding-house and Harlem flat people that don't know a pigeon-blood from a jew's-harp stuffed and boozy on descriptions of your jewelry. I'll have every sporting man on Broadway cracked on his own notion of who's the thief. By George, I swear if I can't get 'em back for you, Mary, I'll have every woman in New York putting up her good two dollars to see the woman that lost 'em! Say, Thomason—" he looked up from his hurried scribbling at his star's little travelling-desk, "carriage outside still?"

"Yes, Mr. Daley."

"Well, you jump into it and go after that policeman and ride him up here. You give him to understand we didn't want him to get his boots muddied. Oh, and stop at the florist's, and tell Miss Austin's maid, if she's got those roses grown yet, Miss Austin wants 'em for the first act, not for her funeral." He turned back to the star as the door closed upon the correctness of Thomason. "Your list ready for the papers, Mary?"

She handed him a pencilled slip. "Will this do?"

He glanced at it. "Well, I'll fix it up for you. What a pity you went in for oddity, arrangements and workmanship and all that, instead of stones!"

"It couldn't make much difference, now," she reminded him.

"Well, it would sound a lot better." He began to read aloud:

"1 necklace, diamonds and sapphires, $10,000.

1 necklace, diamonds, $5,000.

1 brooch, cluster, rose diamonds, set with white diamonds, $1750.

1 brooch, cluster, yellow diamonds, set with white diamonds, $1600.

1 star sapphire brooch, set with diamonds, $3,000.

1 tortoise-shell comb set with topaz, $325.

1 hair ornament, pendant, rubies and diamonds, $2,000.

1 string turquoise matrix, intersected by pearls, $200.

1 lace pin, opal and diamonds, $125.

1 lace pin, single pearl, $100.

1 belt buckle, jade and brilliants, $150.

1 small gold cross—(it was ten dollars, Mary).

1 necklace, rubies, set in little bangles of rose gold, $4,000.

1 pendant, topaz, set with pearls and diamonds, $500.

"$35,600 and odd dollars, by Jove!"

"Yes," she said. "Every cent, all of my profits that I dared. I love bright stones. One of my forebears, Robert, must have come out of the East. I've been an extravagant hussy!" she demurely added.

"Extravagant! Not a bit. I shall have to touch 'em

up as it is. You couldn't offer the public less than a clean fifty thousand dollars' worth. Think what they're used to being gulled with."

"It will sound so dull," she smiled at him, "for me to have bought them all myself. Couldn't you imagine a few young lords and millionaires to have given me some of them? It would make more sensational reading."

He replied, "I guess we can cut that all right."

She put her hand on his shoulder, and leaning over him, watched his flying pen. "There seem to be some points, Bob," she said, softly, "on which your advertising instincts fail!" She went on, teasingly. "Still, officially, a few czars and sultans and so on would be quite respectable."

"There's one thing about rubies and diamonds," he unheedingly continued; "you can work 'em up to almost anything. Say a hundred thousand, all told. You're wearing your rings?"

"Oh, yes, and my watch, and one little brooch. Bob, listen. Did you hear what Thomason said about that girl, that Rosie Montresor, or whatever she calls herself? Well, if I hadn't been meaner than the meanest cad about her being in front to-night, I'd have brought my jewels to the theatre as usual, and worn what I chose. But I thought I wouldn't wear any. I knew she would be covered with diamonds from her head to her heels; all New York has gone out of its mind about her, you know, just as London did. It's worse than after the opera, getting past the Orpheum while she's there; and Miss Dallis was in front one night during her song when the men stood up in their seats and took the

flowers out of their button-holes and threw them to her! I suppose I'm an old bad-hearted cat, I suppose I'm jealous; but I couldn't bear to go on weeping through a Sudermann enchantress with what little pieces of one sort that I own stuck about me, and that little song-and-dance girl in the box outshining us, and priding herself on it! And then after I got here I thought what a cheap-minded fool I was, and sent back for my necklace."

Mr. Daley laughed. "I guess we're all human, Mary," he said. "And I guess the stones were gone before you left the hotel. Let's be thankful you sent back for 'em and found it out when you did. What gets me is the lot of time the fellow must have had, what a lot of time the safe must have been open to him. He must have had the combination, he must have been able to count on controlling it; there's no way out of that. You see, he doesn't take box and all, he doesn't break the lock; no sir. He takes out all the little cases, and fools round, wadding the whole thing up again, by George! It's like you to take it quietly, but—why, Mary!"

"It's nothing," she reassured him. She took and put aside the glass of water that he fetched her, and smiled upon him, somewhat unsteadily. " I was a little dizzy. It's gone. But so much of my money, my hard, slow, weary money, was in those jewels, and I'm getting an old women, Bob!"

"You!" he jeered fondly at her. "You!"

His hands were still outstretched and she took hold of his wrists and looked up, with pensive mischief, into his face. "Think of it! My little gold cross that you gave

to me before you ever proposed to me, gone at one swoop with the pearl pin I oughtn't to have let you give me, after you had stopped proposing altogether! What a long time it took you to grow up, Bob!"

"I'll give you another cross and another pin, if you'll let me propose again!"

"Well, that's very pretty of you," said she. She was a little displeased, and she walked slowly across the room, pretended to adjust some furs that were drooping from a nail, came back again, and took a seat in front of him. Her clothes made little silky, crêpy whispers as she moved; when she sat down the laces of her dressing-gown creamed out in a languid, trailing foam over the cheap little kitchen chair. Mr. Robert Daley stood looking down upon her with the mingled tolerance and awe with which, when she is decoratively presented, simple-hearted masculinity regards the intellectual lady.

"I'm glad, after all, that I brought this up, Bob," she said at last. "I thought you had gotten over the notion that you had anything to get over. But I see I must try to find it in my eloquence to convince you that you are not in love with me at all, that you never were in love with me. No; now be quiet. I thought you knew it long ago. You are a full-fledged, successful business man now, and it is time you were graduated from that idea. When we were both very young and very poor, you fell in love with my unhappiness, with your ability to cheer me up and be good to me; you were perfectly faithful to me during all those famished years, not because of anything in me, Bob, only because you are an entirely chivalrous and romantic per-

son; and now, you see, you have fallen in love with the notion of being faithful."

He was turning her little cloisonné inkstand round and round upon the make-up shelf, and she took it smartly out of his hand and put it beyond his reach, as though he were a naughty child.

"You have simply got to rid yourself of that idea," she persisted. "It was not at all bad for you for a long while, but now you are coming to the fulness of your power. It's a real power, you're making a big name for yourself, and I simply will not have all your energies and prospects identified with me. This fancy of yours of putting all your money into my business and making me—what was it?—'the greatest actress living, if it took your last dollar to do it,' I won't have you wasting yourself in that futility. We can't work together; your methods aren't mine—"

"Too noisy, I suppose," said Mr. Daley with great good humor.

"Much too noisy. And my dramatic reputation is an established concern now; it was all very well for you to manage me on a salary, but when you start in for yourself it must be in your own way, and you must have a new star, a new piece, something you can make a big push, and dazzle people with. I let you come with me this year because I thought if you saw me day out and in, reeking with opulence and snarling at my maid, it would fade out the last shadow of your allegiance, but I am still black and pale and thin and older than you —now, come, you know I am!—so I suppose you still contrive to pity me."

She looked up at him, her mouth crooking itself at

the corner in the little upward slant of tender drollery with which she was accustomed to smile at his bigness and his boyishness. He looked very fresh and strong and comely in his scrupulous evening dress, and buoyantly young—younger, she stoically remembered, than even he had quite the right to look. He observed her, his arms folded, with a gentle superior glare, his attitude not unsuggestive of a champion pugilist before the camera, and spoke. "Well, Mary, I guess you don't want to marry me, all right. But now, you won't entertain the idea of our being business partners?"

"Thank you, no; I will not."

"Well, that's clear."

"I want it to be. I want you to understand—"

"Hold on; it's up to you, this time, to be still a minute. I'm not arguing with you. I've said all I think about the business deal before, and I see it don't take hold of you; and as for the other, I don't want to bullyrag any woman into liking me. But—*pity* you! You know a lot, but you don't know everything. Pity you! Why, there's nobody like you! You're a wonder! There isn't another woman on God's earth has got the brain you have! And you're the bravest woman and the best and the best actress. Look at the grip you get on your audience from the word go! I never come into the house and look across that crowd of people that I'm not proud of you from the ground up. You—snarl at your maid! Why, you're dead easy! Look at the time it's taking her to buy you some flowers! Another woman would have her life! Look at that down-east affair you lug around the country with you, that Thomason, looks like a walking funeral—"

"Thomason," said Miss Austin, laughing, "is an estimable person. He has seen better days. I believe he was educated for the ministry, or for school-teaching, or something far more respectable than acting, Bob. And he isn't a Yankee, he's a Scotch Canadian."

"I don't care how much of a Canadian he is; he looks like the pictures of that New England lantern-jaws—you know; the one that wrote the essays—"

"Oh—Emerson?"

"Yes; and he gets on my nerves. He's too sanctimonious. By George, if you hadn't put those jewels away yourself—"

She held up her hand. "Here's Hannah."

The maid knocked and entered. "Gracious, Hannah," said Miss Austin, "how late you are, child!" She took the roses from the girl's hand and put them into water herself. "I shall be rather rushed," she said to the departing manager. "If you don't mind, Bob, I wish you'd ask Bartlett yourself to be sure about those blue footlights."

She resigned herself into the hands of her maid, pensively contemplating herself in the long mirror. "Oh, for some pretty girl!" she thought; "some good pretty girl to open Bob's eyes. Dear Bob! I can't have him wasted. I'm so fond of him. I can't have him trailing about after a bony middle-aged lady who reads Maeterlinck. But he will—"

"Is it true, Miss Austin," said the maid, speaking breathlessly up from her kneeling position at her mistress's skirts; "is it true that your diamonds and rubies and everything, they're all lost?"

"Oh!" said Miss Austin, with a start. "Why, yes; so they are!"

By a quarter of eight the news of the lost jewels had penetrated to the remotest dressing-room. The atmosphere was tremulous and ablaze; people scarcely minded the old dreariness of making-up, in the lively interest of the news. Miss Austin was on good terms with her company, and all its members were sorry for her. Old Mrs. Mathers went downstairs to her room to see if there wasn't something she could do for her better than Hannah could; Farnum, her heavy man, daringly sent forth and procured her a cocktail, which she accepted with gratitude; the property boy, who was very young, rushed away when he ought to have been setting the stage, and brought her back a calla lily, stuck in a bottle. And she never seemed so important, so resplendant, so romantic to the general imagination; the value of her loss and its intrinsic beauty clung about her like an exotic charm, and lighted her personality with an electric brilliance. People made way for her as for a dethroned queen; her slim pale arms and throat, without a jewel, were imaginatively more impressive than if they had outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind.

As usual, the house was crowded. Miss Austin's audiences were always large, and what is commonly called "brilliant"; she was somewhat of a fad; something languorous and pensive in her personality made it seem cultured to admire her, people who really cared about acting basked in the ensemble of her presentations, her stage management; women flocked in a panic of anticipation to view her long, lacy, trailing gowns.

Taken statistically, she was thin, colorless, ugly; long after people had forgotten her acting it was the strangeness of her beauty which drew them back to her. She was the idol of the stage-hands, of young girls, and of boys not quite grown up; older men disliked her—were aware in her of something caustic, something clear-sighted and judicial, something that was not caught by their charm. She was respected, but not popular.

The highly bred can never get themselves to the beginning of a play, no matter at what time the play begins, and rustling streams of fashion continued to flow down the aisles and over the feet and past the eyes of the punctual vulgarians during the first half of the first act. Miss Austin found herself unusually, unduly exasperated by this. Directly after her first entrance she almost tapped her foot in irritation, and she soon began to be aware that she was losing her grip upon her audience, that she was mechanical, inattentive, out of the picture. It took a certain amount of effort to continue speaking her lines. She detected in herself a tendency to peer about, to stop and listen. The loss of the jewels had gotten into her nerves, her mind kept trying to follow them; at first, she had felt only rather blank, but now she began to realize that they were gone, shining under other eyes, handled by other fingers, marshalled and hidden by complacent thieves in a malicious triumph. She was a hard worker, a strict disciplinarian; her company, accustomed to a sharp supervision, a steady, central grasp, was a little chilled, a little thrown out, the tension was relaxed, good team-play became impossible.

The first box on the stage-right was still empty; Miss Austin whispered to the astonished ingenue that Miss Montresor's interest had evidently departed with the jewels. At that moment, with a great sweep and rustle and flash, Miss Montresor came into the box.

The act dragged on. Miss Austin went through the mechanism of her work, her voice sounding in her own ears far away, unconvincing, flat. She no longer blamed the audience for its inattention, but the curiosity and comment excited by Miss Montresor's entrance, the opera-glasses which were levelled at that elaborate head, the rustle and clatter and flounce of the stiff satin and jet as the young woman seated herself in the extreme front of the box where public curiosity might glut itself upon her, made Miss Austin a little sullen and touched her mettle. Her instinctive antipathy to the girl became, in her irresponsible and nervous state, a coldness which was almost conscious opposition. She tried to collect her forces, and she avoided looking into the box. It was a little time before she realized that there was something new going on, an excitement, something alert and whispering in the distraction of her associates. Little exclamatory noises exploded in the left first entrance, people dodged in and out of it against her express orders. She was beginning the last speech of the first act, in which she stood almost facing this left entrance, and she was annoyed, she wondered if she were jealous, at finding that the people in it were staring past her at the inevitable Miss Montresor. Suddenly she saw that the ingenue, whose hand she held, was staring in that direction, too. Something in the ingenue's look startled her, she turned slowly toward her

bedizened rival, and met the kindly pity and disappointment of a pair of round blue eyes. The next moment her mouth dropped open, her voice caught and died away. Miss Montresor was in full evening dress with a picture hat; she leaned forward, conspicuous, serene, a little stiff, like a beautiful Dutch doll, radiant in her popularity and her youth, rosy and shining in the dark box in her white and pink and golden loveliness; and there, in her black dress, in her plumed hat, on her beautiful bare wrists, on her arms, in her hair, and deep about her breast and the length of her slender throat glittered and sparkled the entire glory of Miss Austin's precious stones.

The actress felt her blood quicken in her like a wave of warmth. A strong human pleasure of excitement glowed within her; she turned gently away from the box again, and finished her climax in a swift incisive fire of delivery. The audience was startled into applause. The girl in the box turned and said something to a man sitting behind her, and the curtain came down.

"My maid has gone for her," Miss Austin said to the police officer in plain clothes, "to say I should like to speak to her. But will she come?"

"I guess she'll come all right," said the officer. "It won't be her game to make a scene she'd get the worst of it in—not before the audience. But you mustn't think, ma'am, that the rest is going to be very pretty. If she came by the things honestly, she'll make a strong fight for them. She's not the kind, you understand, that most any sort of publicity can do any harm to; if there's been any fellow hard up enough, and cracked on

her enough, to have stolen your things for her, it'll be just another advertisement for her."

"Surely he wouldn't have dared, for her sake, to have given them to her without some kind of warning."

"You can't tell what a man'll do, when he's crazy. But I must say myself it don't look to me like chance. Well, if she wore those stones here to-night on purpose, she's got some pretty deep game afoot. And they'll play it for all its worth, she and the man that runs her."

"Oh, yes!" said Mr. Daley, with sudden avidity; "her manager, Higgins. Let's have him in here, too!"

"Oh, he won't get away. I've got that box pretty close watched, I can tell you. But we want the woman alone first. What I want to put you on about is any sympathy racket. She's a mighty handsome girl—"

"She looks like an angel!" said Mr. Daley.

"Well, it's just those angel faces can do the dirty work. She's been travelling round with this fellow for years, dancing in the provinces, singing and dancing in all sorts of queer dives. And when he got a chance to bring her out in London she was what you might call a nine-days' wonder there, the same as here. She left there all of a sudden, they said on account of the fancy prices over here, but before she left there was some sort of a muss about a bracelet some young swell gave her, or didn't give her, and she handed it back to him again. She seems to turn people's heads easy enough. I suppose she doesn't shake this Higgins because he puts her onto all her rackets."

"But what possible motive could she have for letting me know she had my jewels?"

"Well, I can't really say yet, ma'am. It might be a case of blackmail, same as Sir George Lorton worked on his wife, who was an actress. She used to wear the family jewels on the stage as a sort of 'ad.' Sir George lit out for Australia with them and pawned them, and then swore they were imitation, and actually scared some money out of his wife by threatening to expose her for cheating the public with false pretences!"

"But Miss Austin's jewels weren't imitation," said Curtis.

"No more were the others," said the officer. "It was just a trick Sir George played to get a little pocket-money."

"The connection does not seem so very likely," Miss Austin demurred.

"Well, ma'am," said the officer, "it doesn't seem very likely, any way you take it. And so long as there's something queer, somewhere—"

There was a knock at the door. The little dressing-room fell strangely silent, and its silence was penetrated by the wistful, suggestive music of the entr'acte waltz. Miss Austin shuddered. She moved to the door, and opened it herself. Miss Montresor, still shimmering in her stolen gorgeousness, stood smiling on the threshold.

"Miss Montresor," said Miss Austin, "will you come in. You need not wait at present, Hannah," to the maid. "I am very sorry," she said to the visitor, as Mr. Daley pulled forward a chair, "to have to put you to this inconvenience."

"It's no inconvenience at all. I'm sure I thought it very civil of you," said the girl. Her voice, though it

was fresh and soft with a little living note of gaiety and sweetness, was thinned throughout by the cockney twang which, carefully beaten away from the actual aitches, survived in the lengthening and sharpening of every vowel, and the sing-song lilt of every phrase. She inclined her head with a small, stiff graciousness to Mr. Daley, and rustled into the chair.

Miss Austin, sitting opposite, and regarding her with care, felt a disarming kindness for the ignorance of a girl scarcely out of her teens, and for some other quality which she could not name, but of which she had been aware at the first glance. And yet, was the girl, in her flaunting prosperity, really ignorant, or only shameless? Nothing was to be learned from her excessive prettiness, which was of that obvious and almost impersonal kind that blunts perception and defies judgment like a mask. She was tall, and of a young, rounded slenderness; on her little Clytie head the hair was crimped into close, solid ripples, like a barber's block, and glistened thick and golden and smooth down to the preposterous great bun at the back of her neck. Her bright, natural complexion looked false at a first glance, it was so evenly pink and white; her round eyes, very mild and full, regarded the world with a baby stare; she had a gentle, rather rigid dignity, like that of a good child. Miss Austin could make nothing of that imperturbable radiance; whether it was strangely stupid, or strangely daring, she could not guess, but yet there was something, some poignant reminiscence connected with it, and suddenly she remembered, and almost exclaimed. When she was a little girl, a very morbid, lonely, intense little girl, there had been raffled at a

church fair near her home, a great wax doll. The sick and dreamy child had admired it beyond the pictures of angels. It had worn a long, black rustling dress, and it had had a round pink and white face, flat, rippled golden hair. In manner it had had a pleasing stiffness, a polite smile. Somehow or other, she had gotten a ticket for that raffle; she had lain awake night after night, clasping, in imagination, the doll in her arms; all the long days she had dreamed of nothing else; she had started a wardrobe for it; out of an old fairy tale which years after people made into an operetta, she had named it to herself, a sweet name, Rosalba. And then, someone else drew the right number. She never saw the doll again; she never cared for any other doll. All her childhood Rosalba gleamed before her, an imperishable regret. And now, directly opposite, and beautiful, exactly as a child conceives of beauty, she beheld the equivalent of that long-desired presence. She remembered that Miss Montresor was called Rosie, and looked at her with that slanting smile which was generally reserved for Robert Daley. At that moment the police officer drew a chair jauntily in front of the door and sat down. Miss Austin suddenly felt as though she herself were in a trap.

She was seized by a swift, absurd determination. The dancer, if she surrendered, should know what she was doing.

"Miss Montresor," said the star, "I wanted not only to speak to you myself, but to introduce to you these gentlemen, Mr. Robert Daley, my manager," Miss Montresor once more statelily inclined her head, "and Mr. Murtha, of the police."

"Of the police!" Miss Montresor somewhat coyly echoed. "My word!" She turned and looked at Mr. Murtha with an interested amusement in which she almost winked at him.

The officer made a little gesture of displeasure and impatience. He felt that Miss Austin's information had been premature.

"Oh!" continued the young lady, "about your jewels, to be sure! Well, Mr. Officer, I hope you make short work of finding 'em. It's an awful thing for a girl to see everything she's got go into somebody else's pocket. It knocks one a bit silly, I should think."

"I think it has knocked me altogether silly," responded Miss Austin. "I scarcely know what to believe. I wish I might be dreaming."

"Fancy! I saw you were a bit off at first. 'Poor soul!' I said to Higgins, 'she's thinking of her loss, and no wonder,' I said."

"How did you know Miss Austin had lost her jewels?" asked the officer.

"I was there when they found out."

"Didn't you think the stones were pretty?"

"Why, how should I know? I never set eyes on 'em, did I?"

"You wouldn't know them if you should see them?"

"Why, no!" said the girl, with an impatient laugh. "What's the man driving at?"

Miss Austin leaned forward. "There is something I should like to ask you." She waved an explanatory hand toward the long string of pearls and turquoises the girl was at that moment loosening about her throat. "How did you come to wear these here to-night?"

"There!" cried Miss Montresor, "that's what I said to Higgins. ' 'Iggins—Higgins,' I said, 'what's the use o' wearing all these there to-night? It'll only remind her of her pretty things,' I said. But he wouldn't have it. He's got a regular taste for something sparkly, he has; and he keeps me always looking like I was on parade." She shook a string of diamonds that was twisted round her wrist. "But they are pretty," she smiled.

"You seem very fond of jewels," said Miss Austin. "It seems to me that you have bought a great many for a young girl."

"My word! I didn't buy 'em! I've got a lot else to do with my money, I have! Luck was never much my way before, and you never can tell when it'll stop, you know. I daresay I shan't be drawing a hundred pounds a week for very long, I shan't." She looked down, musingly, at the surprising glitter on her breast. "These were only given to me to-dye—to-day," she affably corrected herself.

"Given to you!" implored Miss Austin; "O! By whom?" She added, with growing confidence, "To-day! What, all at once?"

The girl colored. "W'y yes," she said.

"You must have struck it rich!" said the officer. "Who gave them to you?"

"W'y!" cried Miss Montresor, "wot's that to you? You mustn't try any of your police manners on me, my man."

Miss Austin said very gently, "I am afraid you will have to answer."

The girl's eyes flashed. She stood up. "See 'ere!"

she cried, "wot is this? You're all pretty queer, I think!"

Her excitement was contagious; the officer and Miss Austin also rose; Mr. Daley came a step nearer to the girl, and fell back again. Miss Austin observed his discomfort with sympathy; it was a new business for Bob to be in, the worrying of a woman.

Miss Montresor observed the position of the officer. "Wot are you doing in front of that door?" she demanded. She gathered up the lace and jet of her skirts, as though to go. "Get away! I've 'ad enough of it 'ere," she declared. But she did not move.

"I'm not going to get away," said the officer, "and neither are you!"

She questioned Daley and Miss Austin with quick looks. "Wot does he mean?"

Miss Austin clenched her hands. "Don't be afraid," she began.

"I'm not afrayd!" said the girl, lifting her head.

"Well, then," said the officer, "look here. This lady's lost close onto forty thousand worth of precious stones, and you're covered with 'em this minute like a shop window. What have you got to say about it?"

There was a long pause. Miss Montresor turned at last from the officer to look at Miss Austin and her manager. "And was this the reason that you asked me to come and speak to you?"

"We hoped you would clear yourself," said Miss Austin.

"You didn't. You 'oped I should give myself awye!"

"Possibly," answered Miss Austin, with an exasperated flare of temper. "I wanted my jewels!"

"And do you think if I'd stolen 'em, I'd be wearing them under your nose? I should be a silly, I should!"

"Well," broke in the officer, "there was never anything done so queer and so deliberate as that for nothing. There's games and games in your business. I know pretty well what yours is, and before I'm through with you, you can rest easy I'll know the whole of it. You've overreached yourself this time, you and Higgins."

"Is this," said the girl, continuing to overlook the officer, "is this wot both o' you think?"

"Oh, my dear," said Miss Austin, pitifully, "there are the stones! What are we to make of that?"

"Well, wot are we? They're mine, I s'y. You s'y they're yours. It's even, isn't it? You expect me to believe you, why don't you believe me? If you ask me for things to prove it, why shouldn't I ask you? Wot's the difference between us?"

She turned her little wax-doll head slowly from side to side, searching their faces. Then she said to Miss Austin. "I see. It's the kind of a girl I am. It's natural to think I'd tyke 'em. Only, w'y didn't you 'ave me arrested in the box, business-like? W'y did you ask me to come into your own room, o' my own self. I was that pleased! I thought you were that kind to do it, and not snubby to me like some of 'em 'ave been! But I don't call you a woman at all, I don't—not now. W'y, I came o' people never 'ad a chance at all in this world, people you wouldn't wipe your feet on, I dare-

s'y, but there isn't one of 'em but would give a girl fair pl'y, or wouldn't be ashymed to have treated 'er like you 'ave treated me!" She had scarcely raised her voice, but now she broke into a loud angry laugh. "And these," she cried, touching the jewels, "won't you look a pretty fool w'en they come to look at them! Not to know your own things, nor so very much about 'em, either. These! w'y these aren't precious stones at all, not one of 'em; these are only imitytion!"

She looked about, eager for a sensation, but no one stirred. Only a little chill settled upon two of her auditors. The officer snorted grimly. "Imitation, eh? What did I tell you?"

Miss Austin spoke in her soft, frozen voice of anger and distaste. "May I ask you to let me examine that belt buckle?"

"No!" cried the girl. She looked defiantly round at the passive, expectant figures. Then, with a shrug, she unfastened the belt and handed it to Miss Austin. Miss Austin pressed a brilliant; the jade slipped back and revealed a plain gold plate heavily engraved with the letters M and A in monogram. The girl looked at this in silence, and grew very pale.

"Imitation, eh!" chuckled the officer. "That's news." He called their attention with a pointing finger to the dancer's concentrated thoughtfulness. They watched it grow into something more lively, more painful; for the first time a nervous shadow fell across her face, she began to betray the fluttered passion of a sensitive creature which feels itself entrapped, which sees walls closing closely around it. Her nostrils distended a little, fear crept into her round, pretty eyes. Still

studying her face, the officer said to Miss Austin, "Could you get me that fellow who saw her in the office?"

Miss Austin went to the door. "Please tell Mr. Bartlett I'm not ready yet," she commanded, "and send Thomason here. He can wait outside until I call him."

"Now," said the officer, not unkindly, "now, Miss Montresor, these things were given to you, you say?"

"Ye—yes, they were."

"Well, then, all you've got to do is to tell us who gave 'em to you. Don't you hesitate on his account. He's treated you pretty bad, and the only thing for you to do is to tell us who he is." They waited; she made no sign at all. "Because, if you don't, we'll have to keep you under arrest until you do. Now, you don't want that, do you? You don't want me to think this is all a fake, and you were in the business from the beginning? And be sure," the officer added sternly as she tried to speak and failed, "be sure you tell me the right fellow, or you'll be worse off than ever, in the end."

"I thought they were imitytion," she persisted. She moved slowly to Miss Austin's dressing-place, where she began to take off the jewels, and lay them piece by piece upon the shelf. As the glimmering pile glistened and grew, her eyes filled higher and higher with tears; she put down the last ornament and covered her face with her hands. "There! I 'aven't 'urt 'em. Let me go."

"Not by a long shot," cried the officer.

"Oh! oh! oh!" said the girl. She began to sway a little way back and forth, with her face still hidden.

Miss Austin regarded her with the pity which she might have felt for some lovely, noxious animal in pain. "I have my jewels," she said to the officer. "They are all I want. I do not wish to press the charge."

"Oh, well," said the officer, "I guess I got to hold her all right. She—"

"Ow! w'y?" cried Miss Montresor. "They're not yours. They're 'ers, and she's got 'em. That's all she wants. I'm very sorry I took them." Mr. Daley started, and she saw him, but she only blenched at the slip without endeavoring to retrieve it, and Miss Austin smiled at him in a disconsolate sympathy. "I'm very sorry. They were so pretty. And I thought they were imitytion. It 'asn't 'urt 'em for me to wear 'em a few hours. W'y can't I go?"

"Ain't you the innocent!" said the officer. "That may go down with the lady and gentleman, but none of it in mine. You never stuck yourself all over with those things an' wore 'em here as conspicuous as a headlight, because they were so pretty. And you never did it on your own lead, either. You and that fellow of yours, that Higgins, have got something up your sleeves, and we've got a pretty good idea what it is." He winked covertly at Daley, as he said, "We know all about it except one or two little details, see? And if you tell us those before he does, it'll be the better for you."

The girl dropped into a chair and crouched there, crying wildly, her head on her knees and enfolded by her arms; her huge feathered hat knocked and swung about rowdily and ridiculously on her golden little head. The sound of her sobbing was dreadful with a shamed,

frightened horror, and with the childish little "oh's" which every now and then escaped her.

"My God!" said Mr. Daley. He came up to her, and touched the jet cap of her sleeve. "Please don't!" he said. "Don't cry. It's a nasty business. But maybe we don't understand about it yet. Mary!" he cried. "Why don't you speak to her!"

"What do you want me to say?" Miss Austin asked.

"Oh, Mary. You'd be quick enough to understand her and be patient with her if she was a part you were going to play, if she was in a book. I don't believe we've got any right, any of us, to make her cry like this. When I was a pretty big kid I used to think it great larks to cheat the street-cars out of my fare, and you, Mary, once you thought a hotel had overcharged you, and you took away three towels; I remember it perfectly. And it's all the same thing, if we had the sense to see it, and there's no reason why she should carry on like this before us, poor little girl, poor little girl!"

The officer smiled to Miss Austin, and raised his eyebrows. "She don't want to go to jail. That's what she's crying for, all right."

The girl sat upright and controlled herself by an effort which seemed to sear and stiffen the young gentleness of her look. To Mr. Daley she paid no attention whatever, and he continued to stand awkwardly behind her chair. She said to the officer, "I don't 'ave to tell anything now, do I? I can get somebody, can't I, that'll advise me?"

"You mean you refuse to tell us anything?"

"Well, I don't know wot trouble I might get myself into, do I? I should think you've got enough out of

me, you 'ave. You've made me tell you I took 'em, w'en I only wanted 'em for a minute—wot more do you want?"

"I want to know how you got 'em, and what you wore 'em here to-night for!"

A little laugh dimpled over the girl's face, and tilted up the piteous, pale bow of her soft mouth. "Well!" she said, "you are greedy, you are!—You can talk to my solicitor," she added.

"You'll have to come with me, you know," said the officer.

"I should 'ave to do that any'ow, shouldn't I? Would someone get my cloak? It's in the box."

Mr. Daley stepped directly in front of her, and looked her steadily and severely in the eyes. "Don't you want to say good-bye to Mr. Higgins?" he demanded.

"Ow! no!" she cried. "Wot for?"

"Officer," said Mr. Daley, "there isn't a man going respects law and order more than I do, but if this lady is taken out of this room before that Higgins comes into it, there's going to be a fight."

"I won't see 'im!" cried the girl.

"I guess you're about right," said the officer to Mr. Daley.

"Ow, very well," said the girl, quieting herself. "You can't get anything out o' 'im. 'E thinks somebody's made me a 'andsome present. Poor 'iggins; 'e will get a shock, 'e will!"

"Oh, he's got that some time ago," said the officer. "He's outside with my men."

Another overture was ordered, and as it struck up, Higgins was produced. He proved to be a tall, pale, pulpy man, with mutton-chop whiskers, and he looked badly frightened. He was fifteen or twenty years older than Miss Montresor, and there was something cheap and slightly sickish in his well-groomed opulence.

The girl dried her eyes and waved her hand to him, with a kind little motion of reassurance. "Don't look so put about, my dear," she said. "I'm all right."

The man's features puffed into a spasm of temper. "And what about me?" he asked. "What's the meaning of this outrage? It must be something you've said. It's that ——— pigheadedness of yours! Why didn't you tell the truth?"

The girl's mouth opened a little, her chin dropped, the hand which she had been raising to her hair folded itself against her breast. "I have—told it," she slowly and carefully announced. "You can't help me. Let it be."

He still looked puzzled. "Did you tell this lady and gentleman your ornaments were only imitation?"

"Yes."

"You see!" he appealed to them, with extended hands. "Just what I have been telling your men, constable. Not Miss Austin's jewels. Not jewels at all. Only imitation."

Miss Austin looked sadly at Daley, and met a candid defiance in his eyes.

"That's the gag the girl tried to give us," said the officer; "and it don't work." He pointed toward the pile of trinkets. "You say they're imitation?"

"Certainly," persisted Mr. Higgins. "I bought the entire collection this morning for a matter of three hundred dollars."

" 'Iggins!" The unguarded warning leaped from the girl's lips.

"Oh!" said the policeman. "You bought them yourself, did you?"

"Certainly."

"Who did you buy 'em of?"

"A man who makes a specialité of fine imitations—a man named Ferguson."

"What's his address?"

"Thirteen eleven, Maiden Lane."

"There's no such number," cried Daley.

"Never mind," said the officer. "This is your story, Mr. Higgins. You bought these ornaments this morning for three hundred dollars and gave them as a present to this young woman. And was it at your suggestion she wore them here to-night?"

"Exactly."

"Well, now, that's queer. The young woman has just testified that she stole those jewels herself, and lied to you about them, and that you knew no more of where they came from than a child." He leaned back and smiled complacently. "Hitch somewhere!" he said gaily.

Mr. Higgins's angry face had gone clay-color. He looked at the girl with an animosity that stammered and faltered on his lips. "You fool, you! A nice mess you've got me into! What did you tell a yarn like that for, eh?"

"I'm sorry," said the girl.

"You've made me look a liar, you have. If I'm jailed up here in this beast of a country, it'll be your tongue got me into it. You're a fool, you are!"

"I'm very, very sorry," she replied.

"You ought to have got your story better fixed up between you," jeered the officer.

"Do you mean to say you won't take my word!" cried Mr. Higgins. "Do you mean you're going to arrest me! To put me in jail! Me, a respectable man! W'y, it'll ruin me!"

"Yes, you!" said the officer, a little tartly. "And how about the lady, here?"

"She!" cried Mr. Higgins. "She's got me into this with that tongue of hers! After all I done for her,—her!"

Miss Austin arrested Mr. Daley's movement, and said to the officer, "That fellow mustn't speak so to that child."

She looked commiseratingly at the dancer, and sighed forgivingly.

"Mary," said Mr. Daley, "you're the best woman in the world, and always were, but you're all mixed up on this. She don't want that kind of pity. She don't need it from anybody. Why, Mary, and you, too, officer, can't you see how it all is? That fellow there didn't steal the jewels, and whoever did has got into a funk and sold 'em to him for imitation. But we've frightened Miss Montresor, not on her own account, you bet, but on his; when she found the jewels were real, after all, and were yours, she thought he'd stolen them, and stolen them for her, and she—yes, she lied to shield him. Don't you remember what she said at first?

'They were only given to me to-day.' Don't you see? She's been trying to shield him, that's all!"

"He's just as likely to put on all this bluster to try and shield her," said the officer. "It's six to the half-dozen, that way. And I should like to see the professional thief that would sell forty thousand worth of graft for three hundred, no matter what tree he was up. Nay, nay; it won't work!"

Mr. Higgins's complexion had been growing pastier and pastier, and now he gave forth an embarrassed laugh.

"Well, constable," he said, "it's not my fault if you're too clever for me. I couldn't deceive you, could I? I am not the first man that's lost his head about her, as is well known. I did the best I could for her, but I'm not bound to go to jail for her, am I?"

"You mean her story was correct?" said the officer.

Mr. Higgins shifted, and decently hesitated. "You said so yourself," he suggested.

The officer rose with a disgusted smile. "I guess we'll all march along," he said.

Mr. Daley went up to the girl and held out his hand. "Miss Montresor, I don't ask you to take back anything you've said, because I know you won't. But, bye-and-bye, we'll prove what's true. May I get your cloak?"

She gave him a long smile out of her wet, grave eyes. "Any 'ow," she said, "you're a man, you are." She laid her hand in his.

Somehow he did not start for the cloak. Nobody hurried him. There was a vague hope in the air that now she was going to do something, that now she was going

to clear herself. Almost in the instant she seemed to have forgotten Daley, and it was the look she bent upon Mr. Higgins which arrested attention, a look of gathering passion, like a great tide, growing and rising in her face. She stepped up close to him, and touched him with the tips of her fingers. "I'm done with you, 'iggins," she said. "Do you 'ear wot I'm telling you? I'm done with you, I thank Gawd!"

Mr. Higgins made an indeterminate sound.

"I want you to know," she continued slowly, and speaking at first with the greatest care; "I want you to know how I've always felt about you. Ever since I could walk, almost, I danced for money; when I followed the hand-organs in the street, and danced, you know, with the other little kiddies, it was me people would throw the pennies to. My father never could abide it, I'll say that for him; many a whack he's given me for it, he has. I used to run off and dance the 'ighland fling in public 'ouses when I wasn't as 'igh as the back of a chair, and come home with a great lot of coppers, and I'll say this, there never was a soul laid a finger on me at a public 'ouse, nor spoke a word to me that wasn't proper. And then father had his accident, and used to sit at home in a corner, a bit out of his mind, as you might say, as useless as a dummy, poor soul, and 'aving to 'ave his mouth wiped every little while. I dream about 'im like that sometimes, I do. We 'ad that kind of a time for years that I can't put a name to. I got singin' and dancin' to do at music 'alls—queer little 'oles nobody'd know the name of, and as I got a bit older, I'd get away for a week or two, with some little tupenny thing that was trying to tour the provinces. I

never had any schooling, nor any rest, nor any chance. Meat was a great treat for me, it was, and I used to do my own clothes in a wash-'and basin. You see, 'iggins, I'm not forgetting wot you took me out of. When I was fifteen I was making thirty shillings a week, and I took out a life-insurance for my mother, I remember. Ow, I had a good enough time; I was always a jolly little monkey, I was. And I wasn't only dancing then, I was acting, which I was good at—you know very well I was, Freddy 'iggins! I was playing Rosalba," Miss Austin started and almost flushed, "in the Princess Rosalba, that I took my first name out of, for my own name's Susan," Miss Montresor continued, "singing and dancing and acting the leading part for thirty shillings a week, and the manager not always 'andy with that, either! But you saw me in it and people told me afterwards wot you said—'Lord! there's a fortune in the girl!' And just about then the manager's wife lost the job she 'ad in another company, and he put 'er into my part to save a salary, and I was chucked out. W'en 'e told me, I thought I should 'a' died! I can shut my eyes and feel like that now, like I was seein' blood. And then you took 'old of me. You said you were sorry for me, you said I had talent and you couldn't see it go to waste, and you were always pleasant-spoken and gentle, and never ashymed to take me out a bit, though my talk was so ignorant those days. You made a contract with mother and me for five years, a rise of salary every year; I wouldn't 'a' called the Queen my cousin! And you got me lessons in dancing and in singing; you've made an artist of me, 'iggins, I'll say that for you. You managed me for all you were

worth. In two years we 'ad our 'ands full, the provinces were wild for us, we could 'ardly keep up with our engygements. You sent my father to a 'ospital and he died comfortable there, and you gave him a 'andsome funeral, you did, and you sent Cissie and Bess to school, and you set up Tom in that bit of a shop, so mother could live with 'im, and look after 'im, like I never was looked after. I was cryzy gryteful! I thought you were the best man in the world, I thought you were—and the Lord knows I don't speak it lightly—I thought you were like Gawd! I studied my business like a mad thing; I tried to speak like a lydy, and I do w'en I'm careful, and I never drop an aitch on the styge, as you well know. I would 'a' worked till I died, for you, and glad to do it. And all this time I never asked w'ere the money went to. I 'ad so much more than ever I'd 'ad in my life, I didn't give a thought to the rest, and didn't know I was p'ying you back with interest. We kept to our original contract, you an' me, an' you payed me the salary you'd agreed to, and I took it, an' no more. Eight pounds a week I get this year, an' me drawing a hundred from the Orpheum and more offered me every day! You've paid some carriage bills and things on the outside, very liberal, you 'ave! But—it's not the money!"

There was a slim gold chain about her neck, she broke it with a snap and handed it to him; then they saw a cheap little ring hanging from it.

"When I was about sixteen," she went on, "you said you wanted to marry me. It never cyme to me to say no. I didn't like it much, but I didn't care much,

either, not then, and I was used to minding wot you said. But I never could abide you to come near me, you remember, and I put it off, time and again, one way an' another, and w'en I got older, I said I'd marry you w'en the five years were up. It was the farthest I could think of. And it wasn't till after we got to London, and men began tyking me out a bit, and s'ying things to me, that I began to understand wot people were s'ying about—about you and me."

Mr. Daley had been turning a tumbler round and round upon the wash-stand; it now fell into the basin with quite a crash and broke to pieces. Mr. Daley scooped out the pieces, cut himself, and continued to stand sucking his finger, a picture of foolishness, as the girl went on.

"I ought to 'ave expected it, I s'pose, for it looked that w'y. There's many a poor girl in my plyce, better than me, most likely, but not so stubborn, it would 'ave been true of; it, and the other things that got said, that would 'a' made my father turn in his gryve. I like a lark, I do, w'en it's right; I was as ignorant a fool as ever stepped, I know that, but in my business a man can tyke a girl out after 'er work's over, and get 'er a glass o' beer, and no 'arm done. I didn't know it was different with other people. And it was you introduced all those young swells to me, and I was jolly glad to go about with 'em a bit, and w'en I began to come to you with things, you said, wot did I know about swell w'ys? You said the social racket was the one to work so as to get a'ead in business. 'Don't I know 'ow to tyke care o' you?' you said. 'Ain't I goin' to marry you?' And I knew it was my

fault we weren't married already, and every time you spoke o' marriage, it was like you'd put a wet cloth over my 'ead. And then there cyme that business with Lord Lackam, an' you know w'y I gyve 'im back 'is brycelet, 'iggins—you know!" The color flamed over her face, her voice died in her throat and rose again in a swelling rush of pain.

"Look at me!" she said. Her stare into the mirror ran over her great feathered hat, her bare shoulders, her costly, glittering dress. "You've 'ad me round in carriages, in boxes, in restaurants, to myke a show of me, you've 'ired jewelry for me to wear, you've made me laugh and carry on in my songs like I didn't like, and yet I trusted you, I did, and I thought it was all a part of the business, like kissin' people in a love-scene. All the time you kept on makin' love to me, and I believed you, and I thought of all you'd done for me, and 'ow Bessie and Cis were at school yet, and 'ow everything you myde me do was for me, to myke me fymous; and times I could 'ardly 'elp seein', and yet I didn't see. Ow, I've been a wretched, wretched girl, these months! I was 'appier w'en I was pl'yin' the Princess Rosalba in a old green rag with silver fringes on it, and a pink wreath in my 'air, than ever I've been in all these splendid clothes! But I thought it would be all right w'en we were married at the end o' this year; you were goin' to let me act some parts then, like I did Rosalba—w'en you were dead sure o' me, you see!—and I swore I'd marry you, if I died for it—and I'd rather 'a' died, for I couldn't but feel you were unmanly and foolish and mean—because you 'ad my word and you kept on syin' you

loved me, you loved me, but—" she crossed her arms on her breast with a soft triumphant laugh—"you don't; you've shown me that, to-night. That's all that matters. Money was wot you wanted, and money you've 'ad. No matter 'ow all the rest o' this turns out, I'm free. I don't care if I go to jyle, and st'y there: you don't love me, you don't love, and I'm free of you, for always!" She covered her face with her hands again, and stood there, trembling.

It was the police officer who spoke into the crowded silence. "Well, I hope you were fooling us, and we get hold of Ferguson, Miss!"

Miss Austin slowly turned her head, her mouth opened in excitement. "Ferguson! Fergu—I wonder!" She sprang to the door and flung it open. "Thomason!" she called. Her voice rang out loudly, searchingly, about the stage. "Thomason!"

Mr. Daley's face lightened. "By George, Mary," he cried, "you've got the greatest brain! I thought there was something queer about that fish," he added to the officers.

"Thomason isn't here ma'am," answered the stage-hand. "He left this note, please."

"Miss Austin," said the stage manager, "they've sent around twice from the front of the house. I can't hold this audience much longer. They won't stand it."

"Oh, tell them I've fainted, or something," said she, impatiently.

She shut the door again, and tore open the envelope. Beside the letter there was an enclosure which she looked at with a puzzled laugh. She read the letter aloud:

"MISS AUSTIN: *Madam*—You are of course aware that before I sank to the menial position which I have occupied with you, I took, with even my humble means, an active part in many charitable concerns. The redemption of the unfortunate has been, I may say, my vocation. During the years when I had every reason to suppose that I should always be in possession of a sufficient competence, I pledged myself to a certain meritorious society to pay three hundred dollars a year for five years toward a training school and House of Help which it was desirous of assisting. In the popularity resultant upon this offer, I was elected president of the society for the term of ten years. The society was faithful to me in my worldly misfortunes and I did not withdraw from my high office. This week was the time when my last yearly payment became due. You will be the first to understand, madam, that no such payment was possible to me. It was at the time of this extreme necessity that by one of those extravagant expressions, due, probably to the general lax effusion of your profession, you led me into a serious error. One evening when I had brought you your jewel-box, you folded it in your arms as though it were an infant, and when Mr. Daley remonstrated with you, you said, as I well remember, "O, yes, yes, I know. False and fair, all paste, all gauds, all glittering dust!" and you laughed in that disdainful manner so many observe in you. What was I to infer? I supposed that the public was being deluded at a nominal cost, and that the young people, of whom, unfortunately, a great many witness your performances, were being falsely attracted toward the stage, toward a life of

prodigality and vain show. While I was in this condition of mind it occurred to me that these meretricious counterfeits of which the custody was always forced upon me, were worth more than the small amount necessary to avert ignominy from a faithful and industrious career. I am aware that minds habituated to merely mundane considerations will regard my next action with deeply rooted prejudice. I procured a lock-box sufficiently similar to your own, packed it to a corresponding weight, carried it last night in the hand of the arm over which I carried my overcoat, and while I was walking behind you into the lobby of the hotel, I exchanged the boxes, leaving my own in the hotel safe. This morning I sought out Mr. Higgins as a probable purchaser and sold them to him, as the imitations I supposed them to be, for three hundred dollars. I thought them worth probably more, but I scorned to gain a penny for my personal aggrandizement. My idea was to remain in your employ until I had saved another three hundred, or, if possible, the exact value of the ornaments, which I should then have paid to you in their place. It was merely a question of time. I have made some small investments which will eventually assist me to independence. But this evening, when I apprehended that Mr. Higgins and Miss Montresor had forced an unexpected issue, and were certain to be arrested, when I learned that the jewels were real, and that I could never repay you for them, and when I looked at her from the entrance and saw how admirably they became her, and imagined her beautiful distress, I decided upon my present course. I have left town on the half past eight train. With the foregoing com-

plete information, I return the three hundred, which I shall be obliged to you if you will hand to Mr. Higgins, as I could not, in honor, allow him to suffer financially. If you should desire to send me the week's salary almost due me, it will reach me care of the society, as below. As I have observed in you many humane, though unconsidered qualities, I trust the recovery of your jewels will afford you gratification.

"Your obedient servant,

JOSEPH THOMASON."

"My word!" said Miss Montresor.

Between the second and third acts there was a heavy change of scene, but the heroine did not change her travelling dress, and Miss Austin returned to her dressing-room with plenty of time to converse with Miss Montresor, whom she had asked to wait for her there. The officer and Mr. Higgins had long since departed, but she found Mr. Daley pacing up and down, sentinel-wise, outside the door.

She went into the room, and smiled at the girl, who rose at her approach.

"Miss Montresor," she said, "could you care to go in front for the rest of the piece? Mr. Daley is waiting to take you back to your box."

"Thank you," said the girl. "I should be very glad." She spoke with the dignity of humble sadness, out of an immense gentleness and reserve.

"And," said Miss Austin, "it's a good deal to ask, but—those people out there have seen you in these jewels. I can't bear they should see you without them, this same evening."

"Thank you; you're kind to think of it. But I'm done with all that, with being like—wot did he say, 'like a shop-window'; that was never my choice, that wasn't."

Miss Austin came up and put her hands on the girl's shoulders. "My dear," she said, "we've made you suffer a great deal here to-night, between us all. But we suffered a great deal—for you, too; and if I didn't quite believe in you, as Mr. Daley did, I'm a good bit older than either of you, and sometimes I don't quite believe in myself. It's been a great happiness to me to find you out, and I hope and pray we shall be friends." She lifted caressingly in her hand the cluster of rose-diamonds; the lovely flush trembled like a living breath in the pure stone. "Please keep this," she insisted. "It's like you, you know, and like—like your name, Rosalba. Won't you take it?"

There was a little pause, and then, "I don't mind!" said the girl. Suddenly she put her face against Miss Austin's shoulder.

After a minute or so, "I shall be a guy to go in front with Mr. Daley, shan't I?" said Miss Montresor. She produced a powder puff, and patted her nose.

Miss Austin drew her to the door and opened it. The girl's fingers were still clinging to the elder woman's hand, but she moved forward to Mr. Daley, at once serene and shy amidst her liquid clatter of tinkling jet. In the breast of her black dress the rose-white diamonds made a little nest of light.

Miss Austin smiled to the manager. "Take care of her, Bob. Good-bye."

"I'll try," said Mr. Daley. "We'll be back after the piece."

"Good-bye, Bob," she replied.

He opened the door that led to the box, and stood aside for the girl to pass. She stepped forward with her sweet, mannered bow, and he lifted his head and followed her.

Miss Austin went back into her dressing-room and stood at her make-up shelf packing up her jewels, the care of which she suddenly, somewhat indifferently, confided to her maid. The light on the big looking-glass was very strong. It seemed to her that her face had never looked so long or so lined, so hollowed, so full of creeping shadows. She took up her rouge-paw. As she did so her eye fell upon a phrase of Thomason's communication which lay open on the shelf—"When I saw how admirably they became her, and when I imagined her beautiful distress—" Singly, in the letter, it had a genuine and human ring. The fresh, docile femininity of the girl seemed to float in it like a fragrance; she saw the bright little head, the kind face, rosy and young, the round, blue, courageous eyes.

"Ah, Thomason, even you!" she said with a smile, and sighed.

The stage was not yet set. A shabby old volume of Ibsen lay open on the shelf, and she sat down and began to read.

THE INTERPRETRESS

THE INTERPRETRESS

"A MOMENT, if you please!" The cool voice of the star rose above that of her stage manager, above the mingled noises of the big scene—"Ladies and gentlemen, the rehearsal is dismissed."

Among the shadows of the bare stage her auditors stopped short with the lines stricken on their lips. Little groups, waiting for their cues, turned and stared; the stage-hands, who were carrying out old scenery on its way to the storehouse, wondered stolidly what had got into her; men looked up from their newspapers with startled eyebrows, and a privileged old lady who was doing fancy work in a corner, dropped it and gaped. The star turned with one of her long sweeping movements that were so potent to command scattered attentions. "At ten to-morrow, ladies and gentlemen, if you please."

She could not escape, nor they restrain, their whispers, their hurried speculations, but they seized upon their good luck with promptitude, gathered up their belongings and were off. Only Hilary Ives, her husband and sub-star, remained sitting on the rail of the box at the stage-right, and he was regarding her with a wondering but unperturbed amusement. As she came down toward him, she was stopped by her stage manager, who called her by that long-honored trade-mark of her maiden name which he had not yet learned how to neglect.

"Miss Austin," he said; "Miss Austin, not ill, I hope?"

She had stopped at the first sound of the name, and she answered him tranquilly—"No, Bartlett, thank you; I'm taking a day off. At a little before ten to-morrow, will you, please?"

As she stood in front of her husband they were practically alone, and he continued to sit looking up at her with the contemptuous tolerance of his faint, anticipatory mirth.

"I am afraid you don't know why?" she said.

"To be quite candid, Mary, no. You're so little given to holidays, you see. Still," he added, as though in conciliation, "it was very dramatic of you. It was nicely done."

"They're fixing the lights in my room. May we go to yours? I want to speak to you."

He rose at once, and she followed him upstairs in silence; that short flight, she remembered, had been one of his reproaches to her. "Why," he had asked her, "did she take a theatre where there was only one stage room? Did she want to corral all the newspaper men for herself?" When she had recently put on "The Marble Faun" for him, she had offered to build him a room on the stage; but he had said, "No, there wouldn't be any window in that."

He entered ahead of her and exclaimed at the stuffy darkness. He flung up the window and in doing so admitted rather infelicitous noises—the cries of children playing in the alley, the thumping and banging of scenery, of crated "properties" as they were loaded on the

waiting trucks; hastily he shut them out again with one of the nervous frowns in which, of late, he too frequently indulged, and lighted some incense in a Persian saucer. Then, as she still lingered on the threshold, he pushed forward a chair for her with a charming little assumption of the formal host.

The room was small, but, despite its smell of make-up, it was strangely luxurious for a dressing-room; the walls were even covered with graceful things, and chief among them, in happy and unconscious ease, were several photographs of the occupant. These latter were by an art photographer who had made his reputation through his pictures of Hilary—Hilary as Bacchus, as the Cupid whom Psyche loved, as Narcissus, as Endymion, as Galahad. They had been taken a few years before, and the artist had caught in them the look by which Hilary had walked triumphing—a look of wild, elusive innocence, like the innocence of the elements, knowing neither good nor evil. Hilary, who adored them, was fond of laughing at them; he kept them, he said, so as to remember what he had had to fall from.

His wife looked at them as she sat down, and then she looked at him. He had dropped upon the lounge, and was leaning toward her, smiling, with his hands clasped on his knee. He was four years younger than she, and it had long been a public commonplace that he seemed the merest boy. Now she told herself, impartially, that he was exceedingly handsome, but no longer strangely so. There was a light gone out of his beauty; it was as though a heavy hand had been laid upon it, and had formed it into more distinct and more insensitive outlines. "I am

afraid," he had lately said to her, with a quirking of his lip, "I am afraid I am getting to look like other people!"

"Well," he asked her now, "which is it to be this morning, dearest? Reproaches, reminiscences, or—threats? You don't mind if I smoke?" She continued to lie back in the deep chair, and his eye ran over her with pride. "You wear those trailing things confoundedly well. It's a pity so few women have your distinction."

"I am afraid," she began, "that you will think it a little of all three." He moved his lips in a delicious gesture of protesting tolerance, and nestled back among the sofa cushions. "And yet, I don't know that it won't be merely an attempt to justify myself for a resolution. I made up my mind quite suddenly this morning—in fact, just a moment ago, on the stage—that we should have to separate, Hilary. Don't—don't move. I don't wish you to be inconvenienced. I should wish you to have all that I could give you out of it, at the worst. Of course it would have been a great deal better for both of us if I could have brought myself to this before, but it's only now that I can, because I don't love you any longer."

He sat up hastily, a little horrified, a little shocked. The last words startled him, where he had expected to be only bored. It was not that he believed them, but their very existence was like a desecration of himself. The separation in question, an improbable thing which a finality in her voice made possible, appealed to him as somewhat of a pity, and somewhat of a relief.

"Of course," she went on, "you won't contest it?"

"You're not thinking," he ejaculated, "of an actual divorce?"

"An absolute divorce. I must have either you or myself, Hilary. I've lost you, my you, already. So I will cherish myself."

He tried to put aside her coldness, or her pose of coldness, as something to be considered later on, and to concentrate his attention upon practical issues. Smoking thoughtfully, he rose, and began to walk up and down, reflecting; he even paused at the window, gazing with blank eyes at those noisy waifs that played about the waiting trucks and under the horses' very feet.—Well, her coldness would not be put aside; it baffled and distorted everything! If it had not been for that, he would scarcely have opposed her demand; gossip, he thought, with tolerant amusement, had granted it to her long ago. It was all too bad, and yet there were desirable aspects. He relied without so much as a thought upon her generosity toward his material interests, and, strangely free as he had always been, there was something gracious in the mere name of freedom. Still, it seemed impossible that the break could be made without those scenes and accusations whose presence he would have so scathingly deplored. Surely, she couldn't keep it up! He was before all things a dramatic artist, and he yielded an admiration to so bold a stroke. But every now and then he strove to bring things back to a center of gravity by asking himself "*What* has she found out?"

His wife, in the meanwhile, sat looking at him—at his quick slenderness, his black little head with its blue, Irish eyes, at all the droll, tender, sparkling graces of his

face; she looked at them as though she had never seen them before. She acknowledged to herself how unequal it had been to match them with her pale darkness, with her long, tired movements; she was glad to admit that whatever heavy dailiness had concerted with the blunting years to distort that gracious and that airy presence, still, at least, he could make no movement which did not become him, which did not plead for him, like a virtue.

"You know," she said, with what would have been suddenness in another woman, "there will have to be a great deal of business done, and settlements, and so on. You will want to realize, won't you, on most of our outside stuff? You will need a good deal of money for buying plays."

"But," he declared with a flash of sweetness, "there will be nobody for me to play them with."

"I'm sorry, Hilary, for one thing. I want you to have everything else, all that I can give you, without crippling myself. But I must have my theatre, my plays, everything that is essential to my own life. And that will be rather hard on you. You—you are rather intimately associated with them."

He remembered suddenly the part in the piece she had contracted for with Forster. He controlled a blinding rush of blood, and said, "I play Roy Feverel, of course."

"No. No, we don't play together after this piece."

He came and stood over her. Suddenly their ages seemed quite equal.

"Oh, yes we do! I've let you go on as far as this because you've stunned me. I don't know what damned ideas you've got in your head, but you'll have to get them out again. Separate if you want to; I don't care

what the deuce you do, in private, but I won't be made a public laughing-stock. Sulks or not, you're my wife; you shan't snatch things away from me as though I were a pet dog. I play Roy Feverel, understand that. I don't give that up for any devilish theory you've got hold of."

She slipped her hand among the mysterious laces of her gown, and brought out a letter. The envelope was addressed in a woman's name in his handwriting.

"She brought me this just as I was coming to the theatre. It was a curious, and, as we will agree, an inconsiderate thing to do, Hilary, but she seems to be extremely intemperate in affection, and she is very nearly mad. I was jealous enough at first, so I don't know what forgiveness I mightn't have stooped to, in the end, as other women do. You told her when you left her, I believe, that your nature couldn't be compassed by any one woman. I thought she liked you rather well; it seems we're pretty good at that, at any rate. What you have written her here doesn't treat her very well, nor me, nor yourself. I did the usual sort of suffering, and then, just now, at rehearsal, it all came over me, or dropped away from me. All your contradictions, all the things I had endured and cheated myself into denying —they were all quite clear. There were some phrases of that letter going over and over in my mind, and all of a sudden I saw, I saw you, you, just as you are, that's all. It doesn't seem real that I don't love you, but I don't."

"So it appears," he muttered.—"She's a liar!" he suddenly burst forth. "She's forged that. It's blackmail. I'll have her jailed! And you, Mary, I'm surprised at you. I thought you were the last woman to

believe every piece of malignant gossip. And about me, too! After all the promises you've made me! I thought you were above this kind of thing.— Before Heaven, Mary, it isn't as bad as it looks! You're such a good woman, and good women don't understand, always, darling." He slid his hand down her arm as though in a reverent caress of pleading. "Give me another trial. Don't degrade me. Think what you're doing. Don't ruin me now."

"Very well," she said, "take the play."

"Oh, don't try the generosity act! You know well enough what you're about. Forster wouldn't give me the play without you. Nobody'll take me as a star without you!" He dropped down on the couch like a conquered child and covered his face with his hands.

"What a long time I was blind!" she said.

He lay thus, minute by minute, wounded and shaken through and through, and struggling with a sense of dizziness. His luxurious, well-ordered life, replete with opportunity, was slipping away as though he had builded on a landslide, but in truth he suffered most from a sense of embarrassed strangeness. He found himself in a country without a landmark, and the vanity which had unified his world staggered in terror and bewilderment. In their few scenes of quarrel hitherto, she had struck to monotony one note—"Because I love you. O! I love you so much!" And now he was forced to grasp that it was not his misdeeds but himself to which she remained cold; her deliberate quiet rejected not only the character and the intelligence that she had once celebrated in words which had fired him like jewels, but those bodily graces, those endearing manners, with which

he had been secure to damage hearts. How was it possible that he was not admired!

For the past few years he had had in every trouble and perplexity one comfortress, and he reached out to her now. He caught her knee with an unsteady hand, and held her sharply.

"Do you know what you're saying? You don't. You drop it. You're unnatural." He tried to give her a little shake. "Wake up, old girl, you're crazy!"

Her glance scrutinized his hand. "I have waked up," she said.

"No; listen. You've gone a bit daffy over thinking —well, over finding—that I was not what they call— faithful—to you—"

"Over what?" she mocked, and laughed out loud. She raised her eyes in her laughter and they looked suddenly upon the pictures of Narcissus and of Galahad. "O!" she cried, "how faithful have you been to yourself?"

"Ah! but if she was to come to you and tell you it's not true?"

"I am afraid that makes no difference now," she reminded him. "I'm not jealous. Only, it's over."

"So, we've come to it at last, by God! You want to get rid of me! I believe you've trumped it up between you! You're not jealous, no? No!—but there are more kinds of jealousy than one, my girl. How about the kind they call professional? You must have your theatre, your plays, everything for your life, yes; and you must have them to yourself! It's a handsome thing between man and wife, professional jealousy! Believe me, I couldn't help making hits, Mary, neither could you

help my making them. Do you think people won't know why you've thrown me over? Since this infernal woman's turned on me, I suppose you'll be able to. But on my soul, you've chosen a pretty time! The best part I ever had. I should have made the hit of my life in it. I've never treated you badly. I've only done what all men do. And this is a nice, womanly, wifely sort of revenge to take—to snatch away the one thing I want, to ruin all my prospects, to break my career—"

"Who gave you a career?" she said.

It was though something had leapt at him. He was struck almost physically, as by a blow, with the change and passion of her face. "Hush!" he exclaimed, though her tone had not been loud.

"No!" she said. "Let's talk of it—of me. Don't you think it's about time? Your career, always, only, in your heart! Then, what were you when you came to me? O, you were a beautiful, a God-given creature, Hilary, and I was older than you—yes, that's what they must have been saying all this time, she was older than he was, and she got stuck on him! I did, indeed. I made you my leading man, the best I ever had, that's true. And then we were married. What an old story, what a joke it must have been to every one. How they must have smiled at the changes we made in our billing every year: Mary Austin and a company including Mr. Hilary Ives: that was when we were engaged; and then Mary Austin, supported by Mr. Hilary Ives: that was when we were just married—your twenty-ninth birthday, you remember; and then Mary Austin-Ives and Hilary Ives. You didn't know they were each a festival to me? You didn't? Each time, at least, I knocked

away one step from the pedestal above you that I had no right to. And this year it was to have been Mr. and Mrs. Hilary Ives. That was what I wanted. It was myself I fought for when I fought for you in that. Was it my fault if people wouldn't have it inserted into the contracts? But you never forgave me. You thought I was jealous of you—I, who thanked God day and night that you existed. You didn't believe me when I tried to tell you that the new contracts should be made out equally. Equally! Would *that* have satisfied you? It was yourself you thought of. You didn't care what became of me. I'm not giving you up because of this woman, nor because of fifty women, nor because you've tired of me and ceased to love me, but because you never loved me, because you're worthless, worthless, and never loved anything but to be pushed and helped and made a star of, and I know, now, that that was what you married me for!"

He did not answer, but he moved his shoulders in a brief, discomfortable shrug.

"Don't do that!" she said. "Don't pretend that it was all my fault. I took you as God's gift, it's true, but I never reached out my hand for you. You made love to me—Oh, what love you did make, Hilary! Maybe I let you see too plainly, too soon. I never hid my love for you. I was proud enough to feel that however many must love you, I was elected out of all the world to love you best. But don't forget that you chose me, that you sought me; if it was only advancement that you wanted, don't forget that you used all of you to get it. I would have given you the advancement, Hilary, if that had been what you asked me for—you were worth that,

heaven knows—and not have come to wish us dead for shame, as I do now."

He looked up sharply at her breaking voice, and she added, "Don't think I'm crying. I've shed my last tears for you. But when I think of what I was then, of my hopes, of my thankfulness—that was what I had been waiting for, all my poor girlhood: love, to give it, to feel it, and then, all of a sudden, I had passed the time and the temper when I was likely to get it, and I had nothing but my work and success flooded in upon me, and then—there *you* were. You were there by a miracle. And you worked a miracle, fulfilled life, and gave it to me, brimming, and all I asked was to give it back again to you, to have you know my divine right of realizing you, of interpreting you to the ignorant universe that was waiting for you; that I should give you, in all I had made of myself and for myself, some little part of what was owing to you from the world. O! when I think of what you were to me, Hilary, everything, everything—" she had no tears, but her breath tore into sobs, and she stood, shaking.

He came over to her, and took her hand from her eyes.

"Well," he said, "and how has your interpretation turned out? What am I? If you are disappointed, do you think I'm not disappointed, too? Do you think I like this thing I've made of myself? I don't look at it often, but since you're bent on showing it to me, I'll own I don't like it. But don't forget that you, too, have failed to make it any different! Do you suppose I didn't have some hopes? Do you think I wasn't overwhelmed to know what sort of a creature you were, and

that you loved me? What if I didn't love, if I've never loved you, I was only a boy, and I brought you a boy's homage. I was flattered half out of my senses by what you made me seem to both of us; I swam in glory, and when I was with you, it seemed that I only needed to be with you to become what your love made of me. I had had adulation, plenty of it, but oh! how facilely it came, and what poor stuff it was when it did come—I knew the honor of yours, believe me! If you think I ever smiled at it, if you think I ever boasted of it, you do wrong to both of us. I had never had a thing I wanted in my life, I had never even had my chance. Was I to refuse that because such a thing as your love came with it?

"Well, you were too good to me, Mary, you gave me too much. You treated me like a mixture of a god and a spoiled child. Somehow, I got used to it." He had begun to play with some lace that hung from her sleeve, and he looked at it with a little tremulous deprecation. "I suppose, somehow, I got tired of it. Your ideal asked a good deal, you know, and I fell to having even no more moments of it to give, and then I was bored by it.—But if you're sorry for what you used to be, I'm sorry, too, for my lost boy. He had a very pretty trick of visions. You couldn't keep him, and I couldn't, I shall be less and less like him all my life. I'm awful bad, Mary; I wish I wasn't. But I had my dreams, too."

"A lie that is half a truth," she said.

"You were always good at quotations!" he cried with a sneer, and flung angrily away from her.

He sat down upon the window sill and looked out sulk-

ily at nothing, but bye-and-bye his invincible appreciation began to lighten his discomfiture, and he lifted his glance to hers in a humorous acceptance of defeat.

"That was the best I could do," he said, with a little resigned motion of his hand.

"I know. And you did it very well. I'm sorry for that lost boy, too. I'll do the best I can for him."

She had dropped back into her former quiet, and now Hilary, too, remained passive, lost on a strange sea, following with his bodily eyes the departure of the first load of scenery and telling himself that he would go when it had vanished; now it was turning the corner, now it had disappeared, and yet he did not go. He was aware of a senseless annoyance at their having loaded the second truck too high; the man who stood on top of it, receiving great boxes of properties, was a fool not, at least, to stop them now—the load would be too heavy, too unsteady, and they would have to delay and take part of it off again. Hilary now told himself that he would put off going till they had finished with this second truck. But as the gay French clock upon the make-up shelf struck one with a pretty tinkle, Mary Austin said, "I wonder if I may turn you out, Hilary. I should like to borrow your room this afternoon, if I may. There's no window downstairs, and you can't think how little I feel like going home."

He rose at once, picked up his hat, stood a moment, irresolute, and then, with a small, broken gesture of dismay, dropped down again upon the sill. "It seems very strange to leave you like this," he said.

She came over to him, and her hand touched his shoulder, lightly, coolly, but once it had closed it settled there,

as if in an ancient, inalienable security and kindness.

"Good-bye," she said. "Thank you for the room. Please go."

He laid his cheek against her fingers, and then he suddenly stood up and shook hands with her. "I've been awfully proud of you, old girl," he said, and with that he left her.

She stood quite still for a little, because there seemed no reason for anything at all. She had meant to reassure him once more, as they parted, that she would do her best for him, but the words had fainted in her throat. She had wished to be alone to think, but that morning's gift of insight had done all her thinking for her. A peculiar sense of blankness and detachment was as near as she could come to any definite emotion. She walked over to the window, and as she leaned against it, Hilary came through the stage-door beneath. He looked dull and tired—yes, and strangely old; he did not return the door-keeper's salute, and when a child, turned off from clambering over the trucks, leaped from a wheel and cannoned into him, Hilary's frown mingled with the sharp snarl of his oath. He pushed the child from him with a violence as malevolent as a blow. It was curious to remember that whatever he should do now, it could be neither to her shame nor to her pride.

Nevertheless, she was startled by a sudden cry. It was Hilary's shout of warning as he instinctively leaped forward, his eyes raised to the man atop of the laden truck; the man cried out, too, for, just as he was grasping the upper end of a heavy case of rifles, he had slipped and, struggling for his balance, lost his grip on the case. The men who had been handling it from beneath stood

upon a crate near the curbstone and were powerless to avert the sickening downward crash of the thing, death-dealing as some narrowed avalanche, right upon the child whom Hilary after all had not frightened away. It was Hilary alone, therefore, in a boyish, a glad surrender to excitement, who, flinging himself forward, sent the child spinning into safety this time just as he himself was hit full upon his breast and upraised arm by that quick fate; it struck him down remorselessly enough and his wife saw how still he lay beneath it.

She reached the alley just as they were lifting him, and she made them carry him into that little stage dressing-room which he had envied her so much. People remarked in talking it over that she never shed a tear nor laid a hand upon him. Some thought he was still breathing when he was lifted, but by the time he was laid down again and the electric glare flooded over him, he was quite dead. She had seemed to know this from the first, and after a moment of their poor restoratives, they also recognized it. Some of them drew back in tears, and many of them, in the reverent pride of common humanity, moved about him with bared heads. "He looked like it was fun to do it!" said one man. Another replied, "That's the kind that does it."

They had sent for an ambulance, and there was a minute or two when the waiting crowd scarcely drifted across the threshold, and it was as though he and she were really alone. She stood looking down upon him, not very near, a marvel to the people who knew her and her long frenzy of devotion. There was a storm rising in her; it would break when she should touch him, but for the present she was still bound in a smothered quiet.

For in her tired heart she was watching, yet, his moment's impulse, the readiness with which he had jumped, and the bright, unthinking courage of his face. The brightness was there still, like something hallowed; it was as though, leaping with both hands outstretched, he had not only seized death in them but had recaptured a lost illumined grace, the light and the wonder of his beautiful youth. That grace and that death had been her last gifts to him, since it was she who had first detained and then sent him away to that decisive moment; they formed the final version of his complexities, her last interpretation.

To the accusing pain that began to break her strength to pieces, as if it were the reproach of Hilary's voice, she answered, "I did the best I could for you!"

A DANGER OF DELAY

A DANGER OF DELAY

THE stage manager looked ruefully at the sealed envelope of the telegram, and stuffed it into his pocket. The back doorkeeper, who had been hoping that Mr. Edward Farnum, the person to whom the telegram was addressed, would get there first and secure his property, went on chewing his toothpick, and looked with ostentatious indifference at his finger-nails.

In the little hall the gaslight flared and wavered; over the dust and unset stage beyond some obscure window shed a draggle of daylight. The time drifted nearer and nearer to the matinée hour; the ingenue entered and the stage manager smiled at her in vague propitiation of the universe. She selected her letters from the rack and went cheerfully on her way. She had glanced a little apprehensively at the pigeon-hole labelled F, but there was nothing there. The stage manager continued to fidget uneasily about.

A thickset man in a light overcoat came in, got his key and a postal card and stopped to speak to the stage manager. "Nevins tells me there's going to be a big matinée, Potter," he said. "I hope you won't mind keeping that property man of yours awake. Last night he didn't work the horses' hoofs till I spoke without 'em, and then he started in and drowned out my speech."

"Yes, certainly. I'll speak to him." He puttered

restlessly after the newcomer, and presently called to him across the darkness of the stage, "Rogers!"

"Yes."

"Oh—a—You said there was going to be a big house?"

"Packed, they tell me." Rogers paused with a foot on the stair and looked sharply at the stage manager. "I suppose there's no news come about Farnum's wife."

"No."

The actor made an anxious little noise with his lips, and went up to the dressing-room, which he shared with Farnum. The room was damp and chilly, and he lighted the two gas-jets to warm it. As he turned on the electric light in its wabbling little globe, he perceived that Potter had followed him upstairs and stood uneasily in the open doorway. He was very much astonished and Potter favored him with a hesitating, incompetent smile. "It's a horrible responsibility, Rogers. There—there *has* a telegram come for Farnum. I can't tell him so, you know!"

"What in —— did you tell me for, then! I don't want to know!" He was very much distressed and troubled, and he looked at Potter with a savage frown. "You're not going to give it to him till after the matinée, I suppose?"

"Not—ah—not till after to-night's performance. It's my orders, you know, Rogers. They've been pretty blamed strict at the office since Teresa Telfair got a telegram that her husband was run over and walked right out in the middle of a performance. These blamed women, you can't tell what they'll do!"

"I can tell you what a man tried to do, all right.

Ned tried to go East last night. There wasn't any train; there won't be until three something, this afternoon. That's what's saved your matinée."

"Good Lord!" panted Mr. Potter, wiping his forehead. "If he had got away! I don't know what I should have said to the office. Look here, Rogers, it's about half-hour—you don't think he's gone to the depot, do you? You think he's coming here all right?"

"He'll come here, if it's only to look for mail. I left him hanging around the hotel, waiting for his telegram. He doesn't suppose that brother-in-law of his'd be fool enough to send it here. Though he's fool enough to do anything, Sullivan. The telegram he sent that boy last night he ought to have been hanged for; 'Operation a failure. Elsie can only live a few hours. Will telegraph!' God! Will telegraph! If she had to die in a few hours, why couldn't he keep it to himself till she was—well, dead, poor little soul? It would have saved Farnum all this suspense—suspense without any hope in it; it's enough to drive him mad. He's a good fellow, Ned is, or the way he feels he'd go to-day anyhow. But a man with two little kids to take care of—I said to him last night, 'You had a rotten season last year and look how you've had to economize all this fall, just to keep things going. Have you been to a good hotel? Have you got a decent overcoat? Haven't you lied to your wife about your salary, so she'd think you kept enough for yourself? And all to pay current expenses. Have you paid for this operation? Have you saved for the summer yet? If you go now you lose your engagement at the beginning of the winter, when you can't get another, and this company belongs to

the Trust; they'd never have you again; you know what that means. Besides they've taken a fancy to you, signed you for three years at an increase of salary, promised you the bulliest lead, next year, that ever came across the water—why, you'll never have another such chance! Now, can't you make up your mind to stay here for your children's sakes?' He looked right past me, and said, 'Yes, if I can't—reach—her.' "

"We could let him go for the funeral," Mr. Potter mumbled. "We could let him go to-night after the piece, if there was a train. Somebody could get up in the part by Monday. But these two performances—"

"Well, if he knew she was dead, he'd play your two performances; we're used to that kind of thing in this business. But if he thinks there's the least chance of his setting eyes on her alive, there isn't any reasoning or any management can hold him. The children, the operation, the winter, every mortal thing will go by the board, and I can't say I blame him. A doctor that came into the hotel office as we got back from the depot last night told us if the facts were such and so she might live a couple of days. Well, it's a three days' trip, you know. Farnum wired them—it was about two in the morning—'Next train to-morrow afternoon. How is she now?' and again at five, 'Is she alive now?' and you've got the answer in your pocket!"

"Ssh!" cried Mr. Potter fumbling with the envelope. But Farnum was not within hearing. On the stage below the scenery was being slammed into place, and above the jumbled noises rose the voice of the leading lady screaming for the property-man; no pursuing footstep

was tracking Mr. Potter down. "I wonder what she wants now?" said Mr. Potter.

"That's only Stella. Why couldn't you keep this business to yourself, Potter. You haven't got to dress with the man."

"It's my orders," reiterated the unfortunate stage manager.

"But what did you tell me for?—You'll have to come in or go out, Potter, I've got to make up."

Mr. Potter wavered miserably out and disappeared, and Rogers kicked the door to and stood drumming on the make-up shelf with violent fingers. What was he to do? After all, ought Ned to know about the telegram? Even if he did know, Potter wouldn't surrender it, and if there was a fuss, he, Rogers, might lose his position; he would be done for, with that management at any rate, and that management was in with the Trust. Surely it wasn't his fault if Sullivan was unreliable and didn't send his messages in the way they should go! But he did not know how he should face Farnum. What did the telegram say? Was she really dying, poor little girl, or was she already—He always thought of the Farnums as adventurous children, and he remembered almost with a start that their boy was four years old. "We marry too—young in this business!" he ejaculated.

The theatre was beginning to grow populous and busy; its damp despondency was threaded by brisk voices and thawed into comfort with the warmth of gas. Rogers's dressing-room was above the prompt entrance, close to the auditorium; he could hear the boys tearing up to the gallery, calling and stumbling. The steam had just

been turned on, and it spit and rumbled in the crackling pipes. The afternoon was settling to the trivial, homely business of a matinée—the business which, in the work-aday life of acting, it is so difficult to believe can really be interrupted. With something of a sigh, Rogers, too, prepared for harness. He took off his coat, and then loitered before the make-up shelf with his necktie hanging. How pretty Elsie Farnum was! What a kind, hopeful, girlish look she had! Suppose that she were still alive and expected that this telegram would bring her husband to her? Fred Donnelly, the comedian, knocked at the door, and wanted to know if Farnum had come, if there was any news of Farnum's wife? No, Rogers said, no news. The comedian said there was going to be a cracking audience out front and departed. Looking after him, Rogers began to experience the emotions which had driven Potter to seek a confidant.

He took out his watch. It was past half-hour. Very like Farnum would not come in till overture was called. What kind of state would he be in, when he did come? How ghastly it would be if he talked about her! How ghastly it would be if he didn't! Rogers was fond of Ned Farnum; he liked Elsie as he liked few women. Ned had known that, and it had led him to some few intimate talks of her. She moved in Rogers's consciousness sweet with the qualities which Ned had taught him to admire and expect—a kind heart, an innocent courage, gentleness, constancy, a bright, cordial way of speech, a certain fall of her hair over one temple, a certain line of her wrist as she shook hands.—There was another knock, and the ingenue, little Mabel Rose, came in hurriedly and sat down on Farnum's trunk.

"Mr. Rogers," she said, "poor Mr. Farnum hasn't any news yet, has he, about his wife?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Isn't it all dreadful? I heard about it this morning. Mr. Farnum's so sweet and good. I saw Mrs. Farnum at the station. She's very pretty—don't you think so?—like a young girl. They've got two children, haven't they?"

"Yes, one's a baby. God knows what they'll do without her."

"He's very fond of her," said Miss Rose, softly.

"If he hadn't been so fond of her," said Mr. Rogers, with a kind of hoarseness, "he mightn't have to stay away from her now. It's no wonder she looks like a young girl. It's been his one thought to keep her happy —to keep her gratified and light-hearted. I had dinner with them before we left; they've got the prettiest little flat you ever saw, and when he's away her mother lives there with her, and they've got a servant and the Lord knows what. I said to Farnum it was no wonder she and the children were always dressed to kill, if his wife had nothing to do but to make clothes, and he gave me one of those grandee looks of his and said: 'I didn't marry her to keep her in the kitchen'—I didn't marry her to—that's all very well, but who's Farnum, and what kind of salary does he get that they should all trot off to the country in the summer, and people here and there to dinner, and a fur coat down to her knees that he smuggled in from Canada—one thing and another, I tell you it costs money! And if you admire anything about the place, you'd think they'd cut the whole thing out of an old cigar-box! Ned built the

couch, and Ned painted the woodwork, and Ned made the piano out of a toothbrush, I daresay, and Elsie picked this up for a dollar and ninety-nine cents, and Elsie saved so many thousands of watermelon seeds and made portières of 'em—it's not so funny, is it? Poor old Ned, poor boy!"

The ingenue sighed. "I wish the telegram would get here in time for him to catch the three o'clock train. Mr. Maltham says he might reach her yet."

"Oh! Sullivan could keep it from getting here on time, if anybody could. He's an adept at anything clumsy, Sullivan is."

She sighed again and rose. "Well, I must—Why, what's the matter!"

They listened; Rogers with the nervous apprehension of hearing Farnum in a fight. Suddenly he smiled. "Stella wants the steam turned off, that's all."

"Oh, yes, of course," said Mabel Rose. "It's Miss Cortelyou. Well, I'm late. I must go and dress."

The door closed after her, and Rogers plunged into his make-up. It was blotchy and ineffective; all his efforts to improve it made it worse. If only he had not got started about that flat of the Farnums! He remembered it so well and all the happiness it had held; the little Sunday dinners when, the servant being out, Elsie Farnum waited on the table and everybody helped with the dishes; the evenings, when people came to play cards, and sing, and eat Welsh rabbits, feeding little Eddie with forbidden mouthfuls; and then the quiet flat last June, with Elsie in the steamer-chair at the window and her baby on her breast. Rogers's unfortunate memory recalled a walk he had taken with the Farnums one

warm September night. They had gone into the park; Rogers had come up from a Twenty-eighth Street boarding-house, and it seemed infinitely remote and late and tranquil in the sweet whispering darkness of the trees. And on the way home Mrs. Farnum had lost her locket, and had made them turn back to look for it, and had mercilessly walked and peered and scrambled in the search. It was Rogers who found it, lying open and a little battered, under an electric light, and he saw what it contained. Flattened like a mat under the little glass was what Rogers prosaically described as "a great hunk" of Farnum's thick, fair hair. When the boy himself saw into the locket under the high white light there were tears in his eyes, he—Rogers flung on a coat and went downstairs and knocked on the door of Miss Cortelyou, the leading lady. "Stella!" he called, "get something on, will you? I've got to talk to you."

The leading lady had come to the eyelash stage of her make-up, and she waved Rogers to a seat with the hand that held a tiny brush. "Sit down, Roggie," she said. "I'm trying a new make-up. Spencer wrote me about it." Spencer was her second husband.

Rogers drew a stool to a confidential nearness and sat looking at her. What she had "got on" was a blue kimono expensively embroidered with gold birds; she had gained in position of late, in influence, she was still young and very handsome, very popular; just now she could not be lightly dealt with, nor easily replaced; if it were she now who would tell Farnum—he recoiled from the shabbiness of the thought. He had only come to talk things over with her."

"You paint them on with this dear little brush," said

Miss Cortelyou. "You don't put anything on your lashes, and then you paint lashes down on to your cheeks like shadows; they say it's the way they do in Paris. Now look, Roggie, do you suppose they'll show from front? Now look! What were you going to say when you came in?"

"Stella," said Mr. Rogers, "there's a telegram here for Farnum."

"Oh, my Lord!" said Miss Cortelyou. She plumped her hands down on the make-up shelf and stared into Rogers's face.

"And Potter's got it."

"Potter's got it?" she said blankly; and then, "Oh! they won't let him go."

"Of course they won't." He beat a nervous tattoo upon the make-up shelf. "But what did they tell me for?"

"He's a fool, that Potter," declared Miss Cortelyou extricating Potter from the managerial plural with energetic contempt. "I'm not going to put a foot on that stage if he lets them turn the steam on like this again. He doesn't even know enough to ring up and ring down, he—What did you tell me for, Roggie? Do you want me to tell Farnum?"

"My dear girl! It's no affair of yours!"

"But if he doesn't see her again! My baby's eight years old to-day," she inconsequently added, choking up.

A silence fell. Miss Cortelyou carefully dried her eyes; she blew her nose, and put some more powder on it.

"When he does get that telegram," she began with growing cheer, "there'll simply be the devil to pay. And I should think there would! It's a good thing

for them they never tried any of those tricks on me! Do you suppose if my baby, if Regina was in danger, and that was my telegram—what did you tell me for, Roggie? You've made me sick. I shan't be able to act!" Her mouth quivered. She looked at it in the glass and touched it up with the end of a finger she had dipped into the lip-rouge. "It wouldn't take me two minutes to tell him if I thought she was alive"—"If I knew she was alive," continued Miss Cortelyou, her self-esteem mounting with the sound of her own voice, "I'd tell him if I did it under Hendrick's nose!" Joseph Hendricks was the manager and owner of the company.

Mr. Potter's voice was raised outside: "Mr. Farnum come yet?" A voice replied, "Been in and out two or three times, sir."

"You hear that? Don't you know what that boy's suffering?"

Mr. Rogers looked casually at his watch-chain and discovered that his nervousness had broken it. "But there's nothing to be done," he insisted.

"Isn't there?"

Rogers looked at her in bewilderment as she snatched out her hairpins, dexterously divided the front hair from the back, and having jammed up the latter into position for the matinée, jumped up and stuck her head out of the door.

"Here!" she called to a stage-hand. "You ask Mr. Potter to come here a minute, will you? Mr. Potter, yes, the stout gentleman, the stage manager. Say Miss Cortelyou wants to speak to him."

She illumined her face at the young man with the

smile that played most of her parts for her, and, as she came back to her dressing-place, her nostrils dilated with heroism. "I just guess I count for something in this company, and I'm not going to try to act with that boy when he's being kept away from his wife's death-bed. They'll find they don't play any of their tricks when Stella Cortelyou's around!" she said.

"Now, don't make a fool of yourself, Stella!" said Mr. Rogers with considerable disquiet. "What are you going to do?"

"I'll tell you one thing I'm not going to do; I'm not going to put a foot on that stage until Farnum has his telegram! Oh, yes! now get up and jerk about! You'll see!"

"What's the use of making such a bluff? You'll only—"

"Bluff! You people in this company don't know me yet. You think Cortelyou's so easy-going that you can always get around her, but I want to tell you that when I say a thing I mean it." She was continuing to get ready for the performance, moistening little sections of hair into points as a preparation for the curling iron. She thrust the iron fiercely into the gas as she said to Rogers: "I'm very slow to get worked up, but once I'm started, Hendricks nor Engle nor the whole Trust couldn't stop me! If I make up my mind to close this theatre to-day, it won't be the first time I've kept a house dark. If Spencer were here, he could tell you—" There was a knock at the door. Miss Cortelyou lowered portentously at Rogers from under the curling-iron. "Come in!" she cried.

Mr. Potter entered. "You wanted to speak to me,

Miss Cortelyou." He looked with some surprise at Rogers.

"Mr. Potter," said Miss Cortelyou, with volcanic calm, "is it true that you are detaining a telegram addressed to Mr. Farnum?"

Mr. Potter's eyes popped forward, and he came as near to stiffening himself as the gelatinous quality of his physique would let him. But privately he stood in mortal terror of Farnum and the inescapable moment of their reckoning, and he almost instantly collapsed. "You had no business to tell her!" he quavered reproachfully to Rogers.

"You had no business to tell me either." Rogers extracted what comfort he could from this reflection.

Miss Cortelyou waved him out of the discussion. "You needn't suppose he's backing me up in this. I don't expect any help from anybody in this business, least of all from any of the men in it. I just sent for you, Mr. Potter, to tell you I wasn't going to put a foot on that stage till Ned Farnum gets his telegram."

A sense of the inadequacy of human speech surged upon the brain of Mr. Potter and overpowered it. As he looked into the face of Miss Cortelyou and beheld its mingled fury and complacence, he was tremulously and impotently aware of his desire to strike her. He felt that he would have given a week's salary to let her know for once what a silly thing he thought her. What he said was: "Oh, come, come! Miss Cortelyou!"

"All right," said Miss Cortelyou. "If you think you can give this performance without me, you give it. You've got an understudy, I suppose. She can wear all my dresses if she wants 'em." She knew very well

that no understudy work had been assigned as yet and she threw back her head in triumph. "If you'd attended to your business, you could let Farnum go as well as not and put his understudy on. Where are your understudies, anyhow? Bring out your—"

"Miss Cortelyou!" The exasperated Potter found his voice. "I never heard of such unprofessional conduct! I never heard of such a thing in all my life! How—how dare you? How dare you carry on like this about no affair of yours?"

"Well, I guess I'll make it my affair then, when that poor woman's dying off there, and got two little bits of children, poor, sweet, pretty things! People always say to me, 'Stella Cortelyou, you've got a great, big heart, that's what you've got!' and it's kept me back in my career; I know that; but I don't care. And when I think maybe that poor little soul's dead this minute, and you with her message in your pocket—What does it matter about your miserable performance? What does it matter to Hendricks if he does lose a few hundred dollars? Just suppose it was your own wife! You wouldn't care a hang for any audience, you—"

"Miss Cortelyou," cried Mr. Potter, "I oughtn't to stop and argue with you one minute, but see here—I do know, well enough, what I'd do, or any other man, and it's because of that, because he'd throw over everything, and leave us in the lurch, with no performance to-day, that, for my own wife's sake, I don't dare tell him, Miss Cortelyou." There was a little silver toy of a whiskey-flask mixed up with a package of lime-drops on the make-up shelf, and Mr. Potter wabbled a flabby hand at it as he continued: "I won't deny it was my own weakness

lost me my position two or three years running, and I don't suppose I'll ever get back to what my wife had a right to expect when she married me. But I promised her this season, when I got in with the Trust again, I wouldn't let anything on God's earth put me out this time, and I won't. I'm as sorry for Farnum as any man, but it's my wife and children against his, and I'm going to look out for mine!"

"Fifteen minutes!" The stage manager's assistant tapped at the door; "fifteen minutes, Miss Cortelyou."

"You hear the time," she said, and raised her brows.

When Mr. Potter attempted to be firm, he invariably blustered. "All right!" he cried, "please yourself. But if I were you, I'd pay some attention to the time on my own account. You can work a bluff once too often, Miss Cortelyou, and the management's getting pretty tired of this sort of thing. A man's at his wits' end with you. But for me, I'm through. This matinée's the best house this season, and I'm not going to have the curtain held one minute."

"Aren't you?" said Miss Cortelyou. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to have it go up on schedule time; and when your cue comes you'll go on for it, as you always do. I notice you've never missed a performance yet."

"Oh, you reproach me with that, do you!" As she talked Miss Cortelyou had been cramming into her already elaborate tresses the hairpins attached to several formless little bunches of false curls. She now drew back, completed, from the mirror, and gazed into it for one last scrutiny. Satisfied, she kicked off her slippers, and put on a stage pair, glanced at her first-act dress as

it hung ready and waiting on the opposite wall, and flung herself into a chair. In an excess of formal feeling she drew her kimono across her petticoat and fastened it with a hatpin. She folded her arms. "Now, Mr. Potter, let's see you make me go on!"

Mr. Potter fumbled with the door, wondering whether it would be wise to go out and bang it. He had no great fear that Miss Cortelyou would carry out her threat to its extremity, but she might carry it out far enough to delay the performance—to make two or three overtures necessary, for instance—and get him into trouble with "the front of the house." Mr. Freelman, the business manager, was not a person to be trifled with.

"It's getting late, Roggie," said Miss Cortelyou. "You'd better dress, in case there's a performance."

"No," said Mr. Rogers; "it don't take me long. I got you into this nonsense, Stella, and I'll sit it out."

A little travelling clock on the make-up shelf ticked steadily. Miss Cortelyou discovered that her rings had got into the powder-box, extricated them, blew on them, polished them with her handkerchief and slipped them on her fingers. The contrast between the silence of the little room and the noises of the busy stage outside became intolerable. On the floor above, Farnum must be making up by now, miserable, passive, unconscious of the battle, and three days' journey to the east a girl lay dead, or, dying, waited for him. Miss Cortelyou sat in an ominous quiet and turned up her nose.

Suddenly the overture was called. The assistant hailed Potter from without. "It's overture, Mr. Potter. Shall I ring in?"

"Yes. Or—no—wait a minute. Well, yes; I guess you'd better."

"Huh!" said Miss Cortelyou.

A footstep with a peculiar drag in it passed the door.

"There's Ned," said Rogers.

"Why, that's not his step."

"Yes, it is. He's been up all night, you know."

The overture burst forth. Even through the closed doors it had a sound of exasperating triumph, security, and inevitable procedure. Miss Cortelyou stirred uncomfortably.

The overture played itself out. Mr. Potter must go forth now, if ever, to give the signal for the lights and to ring up the curtain. He delayed. Miss Cortelyou moved her fingers nervously, but he was no observer. The stage manager sank to an appeal. "Good Lord, Miss Cortelyou, do hear reason. I—"

"Potter." It was the voice of Freelman, the business manager. He gave a sharp little rap and entered. His quick, unhurried nod was all that acknowledged Rogers and Miss Cortelyou. "Potter, anything wrong? You haven't rung up."

"Why," said Mr. Potter, "Miss Cortelyou—I—ah—Farnum—well, really!"

"Miss Cortelyou," said Mr. Freelman, turning to her. He spoke in the manner of a school-teacher who allows the next child to explain itself.

"Why," she hesitated, "I think that boy ought to have his telegram. I think it's wicked. Yes, I do. I couldn't act," she stopped, biting her lips. The easy tears crept into her frightened eyes.

"She has refused to go on!" cried the stage manager, puffing up.

"That's entirely your affair, Miss Cortelyou," said Mr. Freelman. "The curtain is going up at once. I have no time to communicate with the office now. If the performance comes to a standstill at your entrance cue, you must settle with them afterward. Ring up, please," he said to Potter.

The leading lady burst out crying, "If Spencer only had an engagement! If I only had my little girl's school-bills paid! Well, I can't go on in a kimono, can I?" she cried.

"You want another overture? It will have to go into your report to the office, Mr. Potter."

"Well," she sniffed, "if you'll get out I've got time to put my dress on after the curtain is up. But I swear to Heaven if it was my baby who was sick, or if it was even Spencer—"

The conquerors started to withdraw. Rogers rose to follow them as Freelman's satisfied voice again issued his command to Potter, "Ring up!"

At that moment the door opened and Ned Farnum stepped into the room.

Every one stood still. Farnum closed the door and looked at them. He himself looked extraordinarily ill and quiet. It was not the quiet of rigidity, but of a fatigue so entire that it acted on his manner like a drug. A terrible weight depended upon his smallest movement; there appeared in him an excessive composure, dreary and formidable, and when he spoke his voice dragged heavily with the ineffable languor of a

man who is done with life. Rogers noticed that he had on a particularly careful make-up.

"Any message for me, Potter?" he said.

"Why, what do you mean, Mr. Farnum? Why, no."

Farnum's look travelled from one face to another. Then he answered: "That's a lie, isn't it?"

The assistant called "Mr. Potter, shan't I ring up, sir?"

"There may be a message to-night, Farnum," said the business manager; "there's none now."

"Oh!" said Farnum, gently, turning toward the door; "then I must start, anyhow."

The business manager stepped in front of the doorway, and the stage manager lumbered after him. "One moment," said the business manager; "let's talk sense!"

"I wouldn't stand there, if I were you," said Farnum.

Miss Cortelyou ran to him and began to sob aloud. "Oh, Farnum, do think what you're doing! You can't get to her, you know you can't get to her, Farnum, anyhow!" She put out a timid hand and pulled his sleeve. "Think of your children—"

"She's my wife." He turned on her with a jerk. He had lifted his eyes, and the cruel life in them was somehow a relief and comfort to her. "Do you understand what that means? She's my wife. I didn't marry her to let her die all alone." His mouth shook in a kind of spasm, and he stopped speaking. Rogers, coming up to him, put a hand on his arm and said: "Potter's got your telegram, Ned."

Mr. Potter had neither youth nor desperation, nor had nature fashioned him for mortal combat. He fell

back out of Farnum's grasp minus the telegram and feeling of his throat. No one noticed him, not even Freelman. All eyes were bent on Farnum, on the telegram. It was so still that the impatient shuffling and stamping of the big audience came clearly into the hot little room. Farnum slit the envelope and drew out the paper, he smoothed it with a steady hand and read the message through. His face did not change and he read it through again. Suddenly the paper dropped to the ground; he flung himself into a chair, with his face in his arms, and broke into wild and noisy weeping.

They were all at a standstill. With an apologetic gesture of necessity, Freelman picked up the telegram, and in a low voice read it to the others: "No need to come now—" ("Oh, God!" sobbed Miss Cortelyou. "Oh, poor—") "No need to come now. Alarm a little hasty. Crisis past. Sudden change for the better. Thought you ought to know. Sullivan."

There was a long pause. Mr. Freelman frowned gently and sucked in his mouth. The stage manager loosened his damaged collar, took his breath and blew his nose. "Mr. Potter," implored the assistant, "do you want me to ring up? The audience is getting as mad as the deuce. Shall I ring up, sir?"

Mr. Potter glanced at the chair where Farnum was still making noises into his hands. "No!" he called. "Let 'em wait, then. Give 'em another overture. Curse 'em, let 'em wait!" He went over and flopped an ineffectual hand upon the breadth of Farnum's shoulders. "Why, now!" he said; "why, there!"

The first notes of the second overture rang gayly out.

NOBILITY OBLIGES

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GRADY was the property boy of Miss Temple's company, but, emotionally, he had tumbled from his high estate. He had foresworn his joyous and contemptuous manhood and lost independence, poise and caste; he had fallen in love with the star.

Of course this was not quite so degrading as if he had selected any other star. Charlotte Temple was a class by herself. All her stage-hands bragged of her, of her big wages, her quick tempers, even her exact and strenuous requirements, of all the generous conditions of her service. Walters and Grady gloried in telling the newer men how last winter the management had arbitrarily attempted to reduce the working staff, but "she put up such a holler" that not a man had lost his job. They bragged even of that crown-prince, her son, sturdy and lovely and brave like his mother, who rode with Grady when he exercised the horses that were used in the second act procession in "India," and who fed the elephant without a tremor. Marvelous playthings were concocted in the property-room for this young Alexander—Alexander Halcott was his portentous name—and his mother encouraged him in going to ball games with "the boys." Four years before his father, the elder Halcott, had drunk himself out of the front seat of a "society" woman's automobile and into his expectant grave; now that the boy was six years old, all sorts and

conditions of fathers had been known to offer themselves. But Sharlie Temple folded her arms as if she clasped her son in them, and said, No. Her manager, Mr. Lister, a very powerful and persuasive person, had become pressing. But she slipped out of every knot he tied for her and kept to her undignified habit of lunching with obscure youths. She was neither very tall nor very old, but among all the perils of a truly big career, she steered straight forward like a ship in full sail. The spoiled child of popularity, the despair of managers, the *enfant terrible* among syndicates, free-lance and even freebooter that she was, Sharlie Temple was the captain of every creature in her army. So alive, so beautiful, when she stood on her own stage and cried to Sam to lift a border or directed Walters to brace a run, it was as if her bugles called "Follow me!" Thus she was wooed, not as a fortune alone, but by true lovers. All things considered there were excuses for Grady.

But Grady overdid it. Not only did he encroach upon the spheres of the carpenter and the electrician by building new steps, that would not creak, to her third act throne and by putting up lights in her room according to her capricious fancy, just as if he had no union to protect him from these things, but the very marrow of his deportment weakened. In that world where the actors are afraid of the stage manager, the stage manager of the stage hands and the stage hands of nobody, Grady had already exchanged his hauteur for humility, his jocosity for sensitiveness, his shirking slap-dash take-it-or-leave-it manner of performing his duties (the manner of a man whom these hireling affairs are constantly distracting from more important business of his own) for a

desire to please. People began to wonder if he were ill. No more did he consider the members of her company cranks because they wanted their properties whole, nor the stage manager too fresh because he desired punctuality and peace; he no longer swore in the theatre—at least not often—nor did he spit on the stage; he had ceased to stomp about during quiet scenes, he did not occupy the one chair in sight if he saw an actress standing, and he even began to think of acting as a trade with rights of its own, and not as if it existed only as a source of revenue to virtuous stage hands. Whom the gods destroy, they first make mad. The time came when Grady was not only cheerful about the delivery of baggage upon one-night-stands, but when he remonstrated with the men who threw it headlong down stairs. Then the company began to be disturbed. People said something must be going to happen to Grady. And it did happen. His union called a strike.

It was on the morning of the first night in New York. Everything was just as usual; the gray stage, the gray auditorium with the cleaners puttering about among the holland swathings, the men and women on the stage standing in the disaffected attitudes, and speaking in the curiously detached voices of people who were saving themselves for the night, and then suddenly the opening of the stage door, the entrance of the walking-delegate and the reversal of a world. Grady had felt first a shudder of the nerves, a chill of the heart, then, raising his eyes from the cannon he was cleaning, he saw the delegate and knew. The consequences were immediate; the advance of the implacable figure, a few sententious words

—bombastic and surly manager, bombastic and surly delegate slapping at each other in a couple of irrelevant insults—and then the company stricken motionless, the stage in disorder, the working staff throwing down its tools, reaching for its overcoats, the strike declared, the strike in full force, the production paralyzed, a revolution accomplished, and Grady's occupation gone. As for Miss Temple, the last glimpse Grady had had of her was as she had sat at the prompt-table opening her mail; near her, as ever, the boy Alec playing pirate on a roll of carpet, near her—alas, as ever!—towering the patient Lister, sedulous, attentive, the fur cloak that she had thrown off making a throne out of her chair and all things hanging on her nod. He did not look at her again. Instead he passed one hand over the mouth of his beloved cannon; his, and hers. He kept his head bent, because he was not much more than a boy, and there were things in his eyes which were not for exhibition. He stumbled over a stagebrace, cursed it gloriously, tried to kill it, so to speak, with a kick, and nearly broke his foot.

In the property-room he scowled about him, his spirit sinking in the cold and faint daylight, the disheartening atmosphere of chilly dust and drying glue. It was a mean enough place, perhaps, but it was home to leave. He turned away from Sam and Walters who lingered on the threshold. The little dull room brimmed with properties, his own props, his beauties; some that he had only tended and packed and furbished and known how to place, some that were the work of his hands. There they all were; weapons and banners, Indian bric-a-brac, idols, jars, screens, the howdah of the elephant, the scarlet pon-pons of the horses, a rapier that Miss Temple used, the

trick fan for her to break, the coronet she trod upon, her palanquin, and garlands of undying flowers; he knew them all by name and by heart, knew every tack and bit of paint, tinsel and lacquer, velvet and muslin and brass. Only last night at the dress-rehearsal, still hoping all would be well, he had set them out so fondly, so carefully, he had been so proud of them, and now—to lose them, to leave them all to some darned scab! And his cannon! Oh, the cannon! he had not thought of that! She was bound to it in the second act! Why she wouldn't trust anybody but him to bind her to it, to fire it! No, you bet your life, nor he wouldn't trust them either! As it was, her dress had got scorched twice before the leading-man could yank her away. What! trust a new props, a man nervous with an opening night! He felt his heart beats thicken horribly, and he had a wild impulse to fly at the throat of the union and shake out of it the permission to do this one thing, just this one, not to take any money for it, not to be employed for it, but just to do it, just not to leave her, in danger, to a scab! He could not bring himself to go.

Into this conflict Alec ran, cast himself violently about Grady's legs, and roared upward: "It isn't true, Grady, is it! We are going to the football game, ain't we, Grady?" He lifted a wet and stormy face, dark with the same tender fire as his mother's. "Get out, kid," said Grady, and pushed him away, a little roughly.

The child caught his arm and shook it. "It's a nasty strike. I thought strikes was nice. They're not. They're nasty. That old Mr. Lister says you didn't ought to go—"

"Hadn't ought to go," corrected Grady, responsibly.

"Hadn't ought, and he—"

"Alec!" said a voice from the doorway. The child still held Grady's hand and leaned against him and "Come here, Alec," Mr. Lister's dignity insisted.

Alec looked past him—"Oh, mamma, I want to go to the football game with Grady. I don't want Grady to go away."

"Grady," said Miss Temple, "and you, too, Walters, and you, Sam, I want only to be sure of something. Your quarrel isn't with me, nor with Mr. Lister. You don't complain of anything that I can remedy; I, nor my management. You're leaving me, at a time like this, because the men that belong to the theatre are leaving out of sympathy with some other men at some other theatre—isn't that true? Well, then, I want to tell you, boys, that I don't need you. Mr. Lister knew you better than I did. He has got a corps of men ready drilled against this emergency. They will be protected by police. If anything should happen to them, I and my company will play this performance, in this theatre, to-night, without scenery. If anything happens to the theatre, we will play it in the street." She faced them, pale with temper, the sort that goes down with its flag. But an older person than she or Grady might have seen that she could scarcely refrain from tossing her head and crying "Yah!" Then "Oh, boys!" said she, on a deep note of her voice, and her mouth shook.

"When there's a strike you've got to go on it." Alec pronounced, with sad decision.

Sam and Walters snorted and left.

Mr. Lister flicked his fingers. "You see the type of notion he picks up. I, really, Sharlie—"

Miss Temple said, "Shake hands with Grady, son, and come to mother."

They shook hands. "So long, old man. Be good," said the bigger boy.

"So long, Grady," Alec replied and bravely smiled. He lifted his mouth to be kissed and Grady, rather shyly, kissed him. Mr. Lister put out an impatient hand, and drew Miss Temple's son to his side. Already he could not resist the attitude of authority over Miss Temple's private life.

It was with this authority, public and private, that he added as he was leaving, "And now that you are going, Grady, just see that you don't come back. Whatever terms are come to with the other men, Miss Temple has had enough of you. After the length of time you've been with her and all she's done for you, and the way in which she has allowed her son to be with you, you've shown her how much she can rely on you. So now you're cleaning out, stay out." He started away.

Grady used always to be a cross, rough-tempered boy; at this moment he was extravagantly white and could not trust himself to speak. And even then he had to wonder why Lister hated him so, him in particular? "Why is it me he's always got it in for? And she lets him! It sure isn't—she can't think—they don't suppose—are they onto me?" thought Grady, and was swept by a horrible flame. He would have been cut in pieces, he would have died a million deaths rather than betray the secret of his heart. Then he remembered the cannon, and cast the thought of himself away.

"Mr. Lister," said he very quietly, "just a minute. It's about the cannon—sir. In the third act."

"Well?"

"It ain't safe—really, Miss Temple, you know it ain't! I mean, if I'm not there. It's hard to time—I never touch it off till Mr. Lawrence's started to pull her away. A new man, he's apt to lose his head. I know it's only powder, but, if it did go off too soon—my lord!"

"Well," said Mr. Lister, "have you anything to suggest?"

The manager was a man of excellent capacities, and he thus bound Grady and gagged him, branded him as a deserter and an ingrate, at once traitor and busybody, by a single phrase. Had he, who was leaving her to this, had *he* anything to suggest? Silenced and shamed he watched Mr. Lister, with Alec in his hand, lead the way back to the stage.

But when he perceived Miss Temple still upon the threshold, when he actually caught her eye, he appealed to her in a smothered breath—"He means it's up to me?"

She regarded him very sweetly, very distantly, "Ah, Grady," said she with a melancholy, maternal graciousness, like an empress in distress, "a man cannot serve two masters!"

She was sorry for him! Why? Did she really understand one's difficulties or—"Is she onto me?" thought Grady again, and the thought went racketing about his heart. His eyelids dropped. Did she surely see him as a man who loved her? And did she think that a man, indeed, would have stood by her? Without looking at her he saw her very well, standing there like a real queen, and yet just the sweetest woman God ever made, and they had been for so long—oh, she would be

the first to say so!—kind of partners. For all around her were his precious props, his stack of Japanese parasols toppling at her back, at her feet his prettiest red rug he had just mended, and her cloak touched his spangled gauzes, piled so tastily in pinks and blues. They made, all together, an elegant frame for a lady, as if to show him just what he was leaving, and beyond them he was aware of a length of leaden daylight in which dawdled, strangely unreal and far away, a dingy shadow—the stage's open door and the dreary figure of the delegate. Miss Temple stirred, turned, moved away, she was going, going back onto the stage, to the cannon, to the cannon and the scab property-boy!—and she had trusted him, she had almost asked him to stay! He felt an unpleasant stiffness creep over him and struck out for dear life. For dearer life! For the delegate was turning up his coat collar; then he started into the street. And after all, Grady knew the real thing, the thing a man has got to stick to, the thing you can't talk about maybe, but still, you know—"I could not love thee, dear, so much—" he followed the delegate.

After such austere conduct, Grady, in a better world than this, would have achieved something worthier than the fate which later overtook him. By that evening Grady had got drunk. It was more than two years since he had had a drop too much, and even then he had never gone in for the stuff enough to be on his guard. The scene-shifters who had asked him to have a drink with them had seemed to him at first decent, friendly fellows, but a little tough, then they had become charmers, hearts of gold, and then the brothers of his soul.

He swaggered out into the street, and the cold night, black and clear, rushed into his eyes, into his nostrils, into the throat and blood and soul of him like another elixer, like another bracer. He stood still, breathing deep. Stars, frost and crowds, electric light and clanging cars and crispy pavements—Who was going to boss Grady? Who was going to dictate to him? And about his private affairs, too! His cannon and all! Whose business was it, anyhow! Miss Temple was a friend of his, and why should he stand for her being dragged around and set on fire by a scab property-man?—Well, he guessed he would see about that! Lister had said he should never come back—shouldn't he, though! What? What were those fellows bothering about now? Want somebody to go home with him? No! Certainly not! Sure he could get along? Yes, of course, he could. Troublesome, meddlesome gang!—How did he get mixed up with that lot, anyhow? He started off to get rid of them. Promise to go right home? He promised, and they were gone. He had them fooled. For he was a long sight too clever for them. He wasn't going home at all—no indeed. He was going to the theatre!

He had it all fixed up. He would just go quietly in, and he would ask politely, like a gentleman, for the property-man; then he would follow that scab, he would stand by him every move he made, and see that he did it right. *She* could trust him, he would look out for *her*. And the scab would be glad enough to have somebody to help him, to teach him his business, particularly a man like him, like Grady. Only it must all be polite and peaceable, perfectly peaceable. Yes, at the theatre they would be glad to see him.

Fifteen minutes later the half-set stage rang to the sounds of a free fight. This fight, followed by the pale helmet of a policeman, fought and clawed its way up the stage, till it was opposite the property-room and within twenty feet of Miss Temple's door. And suddenly that door flew open upon it and it felt her presence, like a spell of might, swoop on it with a rush. She was motionless, but the high wind of her spirit bore down upon the touzled, scuffled, snorting mob and withered it, scattered it. Only one man, his collar torn and his hat on the back of his head, faced her and grinned tranquilly; thus publicly confronted, Miss Temple and Grady stood eyeing each other, measuring each other and saying—Ha—ha! among the trumpets. What Miss Temple said in words was, "Grady!!!—Come here!"

Grady set her an example in manners by replying, "G'd evenin', Miss Temple." He lugged off his smashed hat and amiably continued, "I wan' see prop-'ty-man."

"Come here!" said Miss Temple.

Grady started forward, Mr. Lister stepped across his path. "If you go any nearer that lady, I will have you put under arrest!"

"Aw to hell, you!" said Grady pleasantly. "She tole me to come, didn'in she?" He put Mr. Lister gently out of the way and "You can't turn that hose onta me, ole gen'leman," he dropped back over his shoulder.

"Officer—" Mr. Lister began.

"You come, too," said Miss Temple simply. She nodded in dismissal to the policeman and the mob. "I am much obliged to you, officer—I will manage my stage," said she to the crowd, and it faded. She turned

upon the offenders now within her gates and clicked the latch behind them. "Well?"

"I wan' see prop'ty-man," Grady insisted.

"Indeed! And what do you propose to do with him when you do see him? Dynamite him? You seem to have very nearly knocked the theatre down already."

A phrase, battered into familiarity by incessant injunctions of the union loomed upon Grady's mind, and he said hazily, but with decision, "No violence!" Then his mouth shut with more of a shock than he had intended, and his eyes closed. Something was wrong with him. The stimulus of the drink was gone, the stimulus of the fight was going, there remained only the confusingness of his anxieties and the fierce heat of the close, blazing little room. Through that same mist of the saloon he could now hear Mr. Lister telling Miss Temple how he, Grady, had worried past the stage-doorman, how he had followed the new props about, intimidating him, until Mr. Lister had to be sent for, and Mr. Lister had sent for the police. How he, Grady, had come there to have his revenge by tampering with the cannon (let her believe that, if she could!) and how the new man was so frightened that he had locked himself into the property-room—" "He won' lisen!" Grady interrupted. "Prop'ty-man won' lis'en. I splain how lo' cannon. Ole timer! Ole fool! Dunno! I wan' see prop'ty-man." He halted, appalled to find himself struggling with a sob. The horrible heat—that was what it was, of course!—made him dizzy and his legs wavered under him. He was too much of a gentleman to sit down unless he was asked. But there was a chair near him and

his whole body yearned to it. "I won' leave cannon!" He added with sad explosive love, "*My* cannon!"

And then a terrible thing happened. Miss Temple turned on him, and her face was a tempest of reproach, "Why, Grady!" she cried—"Why, Grady, you disgusting boy, you're drunk!"

What he! Grady! Why, Miss Temple—She rolled one glance at him and he went dumb, all his momentary triumph, his self-respect, his bluff, his soul collapsed together, stabbed through by a white wench's black eye. Grady could not play up to a tragedienne.

She put out one hand and gave him a disdainful push; he toppled mildly, then he sank into that coveted chair, and his head dropped forward on his breast. Slumber approached him, wooingly. "Won' leave cannon!" said he, "Wan' see prop'ty-man!"

"Why, he can't stand up!" cried the lady. "The beast! Grady! Grady, wake up!" He rose with a martyr's obedience and stood wavering before her. "Look at me, you miserable object! Don't you know you're a disgrace? How dare you come here like this? You that have been with me two years! I am ashamed of you, I am ashamed to have anybody see you, you're a disgrace to me and yourself and my company and everybody! What am I to do with you? What am I to do with you? I don't wonder you can't answer! Mr. Lister, take him and put him out quietly. I wouldn't have Alec see him like this for the world—You don't seem to put him out! Oh, I forgot that you had tried that!"

Mr. Lister pulled himself together, and as the enemy

stretched out an arm Grady spurred his sleepy spirit.

"Come, get out of here!"

"Aw, brush by!" said Grady. "Won' leave cannon!"

Miss Temple looked at them, the one and the other. "Neither of you will obey me, I see."

"Sharlie! My dear girl," cried the unhappy manager.

Grady said to him, "Ferry-house f'yours, Reshinald—No, ma'am. No, Miss Temple. Won' leave cannon!"

"Very well, then, you shall stay here and see how you like that! What's that you say? You want to see the property-man? Well, you'll not see him for some time to come, nor anybody else. Nor is anybody going to see you. Perhaps you will be so good as to sit down again. You do not shine at standing. Larson," to her maid, "unfold that screen."

"Won' leave cannon!" mumbled Grady, and sank into the chair.

Miss Temple, with flashing eyes and heaving breast, began tugging at the screen, which was a Japanese embroidery of gold and silver swallows on a silken field of pink. She helped Larson bring it forward, and as she did, she asked excitedly, "Now, sir, do you see this screen? Well, I am going to put it around you because you're not fit to look at—do you hear what I say?—not fit to look at. And don't you try to leave this chair, you wretch! You're to stay here the whole performance, do you understand that? I *forbid* you to leave! I wouldn't have you passing out again among my men! I'd be ashamed to! I wouldn't have Alec see you for the world! You are to stay here till the last person is

gone, it will do you good, it will teach you a lesson! And don't you put your head round that screen, Grady! —you can amuse yourself by looking at these pretty little birds. You can just sit there and meditate upon you're coming here in this condition—not able to stand, and intimidating all my poor stage hands and my manager and the police!—Oh, yes, I can perfectly well keep him here, Mr. Lister, thank you; I am not afraid of him. Take a hat-pin, Larson, and if he tries to come out, give him a little stick. Certainly. I approve of everything you do for me. I am greatly obliged. Only, perhaps, the next time there is a difficulty in the management of my stage, you will consult me. You see how simply I have settled it. You are coming behind after the first act? I shall be so glad—And as for you, sir, behind the screen, I hope you are ashamed of yourself, ashamed of yourself for the exhibition you have made—if ever you could have seen—" She closed the door after Mr. Lister and leaning up against it, her hands over her heart, gave herself up to noiseless laughter.

From behind the gold and pink and silver of Japan, "I wan' see prop'ty-man!" suddenly demanded the screened voice of Grady.

Long afterward, for many years afterward, Miss Temple remembered all the little crowding details of that night. There were so many of them that they made her late for her entrance in the third act; in the first place the property-man couldn't find the soap to load that everlasting cannon, and the stage manager couldn't find it either; and then Norman Lawrence, her leading man, had come to her, wild-eyed, under the misapprehension

that he was the only person affected by the night's delirious scramble, and told her that the new props mustn't wait for him to give the cue to fire, for, really, he was so upset at the risk that she was running, that, really, he could hardly depend upon himself to give it at all; and then she had had to be very sweet to Mr. Lister, because she wanted him to keep an eye on Alec until the child's nurse came to take him home—he had only come to affiliate with the elephant and the horses, which had been taken away at the end of the second act. That girl ought to have come by then, and it was just as she heard her entrance-cue that Miss Temple saw Mr. Lister again and hung back to whisper to him, "Did Carrie take Alec home?" Mr. Lister had said only, "Oh, yes, yes, sometime ago," and yet she had been an instant late; long enough to be thrown out of her part, and to be unable to get into it again. So she became aware of the great, richly-dressed audience, leaning toward her, poring upon her, oppressing her a little with its packed interest, at once single and multitudinous, of the crowded stage and the organized movement, of the mechanism of things, the realities that were so unreal and created in her divided mind a sort of daze. She saw her leading man, the Indian prince, simulating the struggle between love and duty, come forward to lead the English woman to her death; she remembered suddenly that she ought to have waked Grady about the soap; she thought, idly, as she saw the property-man fussing with the cannon, "Why, he's using one of those old paper wads!" She surrendered herself to Lawrence, the Indian prince, who led her forward, and as she went she saw in his eye the same hysteric nervousness with which the poor over-

cautioned props puttered at his cannon, and as she saw she said to herself, "The creature is going to make a mistake!" She turned her back to the cannon's mouth, two extras stepped forward with the rope, and at that instant the leading man opened his distracted mouth, and out of it shot, thus prematurely, the property-man's cue to fire. The report came so quick upon the cue, that she seemed to hear them in a single flash of dismayed disgust, and with the flash, something leaped past her over her shoulder, so close that the hot breath of it struck her on the cheek, and there, across the stage, before her face, a gleaming ball dashed itself high against the canvas, then fell, blazing, on a grass-mat, and where it struck and where it fell flame leaped and ran and spread and grew like a living, brightening, laughing thing, glad to be free. The old-time paper wad had played its old-time trick, had caught and burned, had hit upon the frayed edge of a drop, and set the scene afire.

The lady that Grady loved was a brave woman. She went down toward the footlights—"Ring down!" said she, and when the curtain struck the stage she stood before it. She forsook all that was dear to her, all the people she had lived among and worked with, who depended on her and who were hers, for that first of obligations, "the audience," the crowd of strangers who were in her house. She was proud that among her own people no one had screamed, no one had run. Now the curtain was down, they could look out for themselves. But these others she faced, she dominated, she controlled. She saw the great crowd rising and swaying and breaking, with calls and shrieks, and then she saw it catching

itself, holding itself again, and then pouring out through the great doors which the ushers, pale boys with their distended eyes on her, flung open wide. At last she faced an empty house. Then as the lights in a single swoop went out, some people came from behind the curtain, her own people; the men called to her as they jumped into the orchestra, she jumped too, and they caught her and she ran up the aisle with them, and out of the side-door after the audience.

When Mr. Lister put her into the carriage which was to take her to the hotel, she was trembling like a little girl, and clinging to his arm. "Oh, thank God," said she, "that you had sent Alec home for me, before it began! Oh, thank God!" If his blood froze with a sudden recollection, he did not betray it, his face was turned away from her, and she did not see it go a greenish-white with horror, with some sick apprehension. For a moment the best that was in him struggled to break loose. But he looked back at that smoking pit which was the theatre, and "I'll offer the firemen anything, anything," he soothed himself. He answered Miss Temple hurriedly, and the carriage drove away.

The mist which had been bothering Grady for so long began to press down upon him mightily, like a feather bed smothering him, like a wall baffling him; it was blinding him in the eyes, it was strangling him in the throat, it was binding him down, crushing him in, choking out of him that life, that sense and spirit, which fought in him so fiercely, struggling to wake him. He did not know that he was trying to wake but he did try, he was not conscious of the noises, the movements, which

had nevertheless roused him to beware—the one noise in particular, repeated over and over and over, striking upon his sense so familiarly, and yet so sharply, as a man's own name will strike him to attention. The noise was that of a very little voice calling "Mamma! Mamma! Mamma!" as loud as it could for terror, the voice of a child. It called Grady up through the thick waters that were drowning him, so that he came gasping to the surface in a nightmare of darkness and smoke, where he knew nothing, where he was hopelessly bewildered and at bay, so that he sprang up, striking before him with his arms wide, and thus sent crashing the Japanese screen, beyond which he then saw by the light of a candle still tranquilly burning on Miss Temple's make-up place, the outlines of the dressing-room, the open door, the stage beyond—the stage beyond! Fear swept over Grady like a cold wave, sobering him, waking him at last for good and all, and with the fear the terrible sense of being trapped, deserted, sacrificed. He ran out of the room and along close by the wall to the property-room; beside that door he knew there was a cooler of ice water; under the cooler was a bucket of drippings, two-thirds full. Grady tore off his woolen sweater, and standing in his shirt and trousers emptied this bucket over himself. He knocked the cover off the cooler, and soused his sweater in the ice water, then he made the sweater into a sort of mask for his face and head; it covered one shoulder, too, and part of the arm which he held before his eyes, and thus strangely costumed he made his way along the back wall toward the stage-door. Parallel with this wall hung the back drop, and the drop was afire. Grady slunk along close against the bricks,

making toward the draught of the open door; the fire seemed to close in around this door, to surround it like a thicket, but it would not do to hesitate, it was getting worse every minute, and the instant's pause he gave himself was only to gather up his strength, the obedience of his will and muscles for a dash that meant his freedom. For this was a prison indeed, where they had all run away and left him while he was so helpless, where *she* had run away and left him. As he drew himself together for his leap there came through the purring and blowing, the crackling and snapping of the fire, something faint and yet heart-breakingly shrill, the sound he had heard in his sleep, the child's voice calling "Mamma! Please come! Please! Mamma!" calling for help. Grady was struck still by it like a man who hears his doom. For he did not come of the deliberating classes and he did not think twice. He only turned and ran back again, crouching as before from the flaming drop, running with his head down, onto the fire, into the fire, following the little voice.

It had seemed, as he remembered it in Miss Temple's room, to come from some place above his head, and he guessed at once that Alec was on the little balcony over the first entrance, where he could have had a good view of the stage. This balcony itself was iron, but the corridor which led to it, and the old-fashioned stairs were wood, and the stairs had caught from a falling border. Grady could not see the little boy: he called to him and got no answer. He cast a measuring eye upon the stairs; these he could still see plainly by spurts of the fierce light; in fact they were marked by a flameless column of smoke which poured from them. He took what breath

he dared, drew the wet sweater closer round his face, and climbed, with a blind hurry, into the smoke. He had gone only a step or two when he choked, but he kept on and suddenly stumbling over something, pitched forward, and, clutching the heated banister, saved himself on his knees and one hand. This hand had hold of something, a soft thing like an arm! What, this easy! He could see nothing in that reeking darkness, but he ran his fingers over the little shoulders and into the close crop of curls—yes, Alec! He sprang up, grasped the sweater he had almost lost, muffled the boy in it, hiding him in his breast, and began stumbling, springing somehow, down again. This time from the foot of the stairs, high waves of fire closed eagerly around him.

When he came through on the other side, he was for the time a different man; he had fought so hard that he was not brave any longer; he was only fearless. He could see plainly that the fire was spending itself on the back of the theatre, the drop had fallen and lighted the flooring, exit that way was hopeless, and even toward that side where he stood, the flames had licked up a few pieces of scenery and thrown out a crazy arm to reach the flies. Over on the prompt-side the main wall, though it was luridly lighted half way up by a red reflection, rose clear and bare and quite untouched, but the stage itself was a downright furnace; the curtain puffed a little, caught and blazed and yet a little while it hung there, flaming, while the black pit of the house stared stolidly at this strange sight. Grady rushed along to the first entrance; as he gained the passage by the boxes the fire suddenly moved with him, its eager gobble of the scenery crowding toward the orchestra and swayed

forward by the draught. He flung himself against the box door leading to the front; it was locked. He drew off and kicked the lock with a steady passion, but it held. He flung himself against it, for though he did not know that the exits had been opened, he meant to try for them—the fire leaped the orchestra and ran wildly up the aisles, catching up whole rows of seats in hot embraces. Grady's heart was gripped for the first time by despair. He dropped to his knees with the child crushed in his arms; there was an instant when he crouched in simple frenzy, then he was trying to see beyond the little island where he knelt. As before it was only across on the prompt-side that there was still something clear. There the solid wall still rose, plainly visible above the smoke, and suddenly a sharp picture of that wall flashed on him with a window in it. A window looking into the fly-gallery and out upon the thoroughfare! As soon as he remembered, he was ready. There was a climb before him where he would need both his hands; he swung the boy to his back, binding him there with the sweater, the sleeves of which he brought forward under his own arms, and tied upon his breast, the wet wool making a knot like a rivet. He felt the backward pull of the boy's weight and lapped Alec's sturdy legs across his left arm, as a woman might carry her train; then, stooping down and forward, he ran into the roaring fury of the stage.

After a hundred years of minutes he brought up against the opposite wall, and without pause or thankfulness groped upon it for his salvation. Ah! his fingers closed on the thin iron rounds, his feet took hold on them, he had started up them! This narrow ladder,

upright as a mast, set so flat, so close to the wall, as to be almost in it, hardly affords hold or standing room at any time, and now he could not see the slight rounds of metal in the smoke. Nevertheless, for the first dozen feet he almost ran. He then turned back to the fire with a snarl of triumph, and yet there it was!—it had moved as fast as he, and its advance-guard of smothering blackness was at his feet. He was spurred by a mere hatred of the thing, and scrambled up and up with the child's heavy body still hanging from his shoulders to his hips, weakening his arms in their hold upon the ladder, pulling, pulling, just as if it meant to do it, back and down to the Inferno. He gained on the smoke and his brain cleared again; he was nearly half way up. He lowered his face into the knot of wool on his breast; dear God, it was damp yet! He breathed in its sponginess and for one gorgeous minute sucked its moisture. As he did so the first flames burst through the curtain of smoke and came licking round the ladder's lower rungs. The iron and the brick wall did not give them much food, but they had run up the wings like mad, and the smoke from these was already closing round him on a level; he struggled through another four or five feet, swaying with an aching faintness he looked up for a glimpse of the dim window, far away-like heaven, and as he looked a flame shot from a wing to the first border still high beyond him, danced along that and lighted on the wooden hand rail of the fly-gallery that he was making for. Something staggered in his head. He no longer saw well, even allowing—Well, no use falling back, no use falling back, better keep on, better keep on, yes, better—His head kept saying something over and over inside itself—

"Oh God! God! God!—" praying, maybe. He couldn't bear to lift his arms again, and then his feet, he couldn't do it! He did not know if he was burned, but he began to be dimly aware that he was suffering some special pain; he did not know what, nor where, but he resented it because it might delay him. Then the smoke from above, below, all sides, rushed in and covered him, and he swung, choking.

All this time he had had no idea whatever of any help from the outside. That this wall alone separated the child and him from a shouting, struggling crowd, frenzied over their fate; that it separated them, moreover, from a few devoted men toiling for them like giants, like heroes, never occurred to him at all. From the time he had first started into the fire he had been as much alone as if there were no other creatures in the world, he had thought as little about human sympathy as an ant struggling up a mountain with a fly upon its back. He knew, dimly and yet with agony, that he was working toward an end—a place where there was air and time to lie down. The lost world of men presented to him absolutely no other features.

He came to in a spasm of gasping from the weight of his own head falling backward. Terrified, he climbed on, panting. But it was only a matter of moments now when he must lose consciousness for good and all. He began to be crazed with hatred of this thing upon his back, that kept pulling at him and would not help itself. He was sick with the desire to strike it, to tear it off; he felt that it would be impossible to save Alec with that thing still hanging on! For all he knew the face so close to his might be grinning at him! He turned his

head to look, and seemed to see a flame reaching toward Alec's boots. He clutched them upward with a desperate tenderness, made a last stagger and swung, reeling, at the ladder's top.

His mind was suddenly as clear as when he started. The ladder ran a few feet higher than the little gallery, he had only to drop from its rungs to the boards which were not yet blazing. In doing so he struck dangerously near to that wide cutting in the planks through which the ladder rose, lost his balance, toppled back toward the cutting, by a fearful effort swung himself once more forward and lunging his full length dashed himself against the blessed window, and flung it open, the free air blowing on his face. He draggd Alec out of the sweater, and set him before him on the window-sill. Climbing after him he held the child in with one leg while he himself stood upright on the sill, the better to be seen. For in that moment the sense of his kind, of common humanity came back to him; he knew why he had been struggling to that window and what he had expected; he was contented, not surprised, when there swept up to him such a welcome as even that venerable theatre had never heard before, the heart of the crowd crying out in the voice of the crowd, "Wait! Don't jump! Wait, wait, they're coming to you!"

A carriage had driven back full speed to the corner of that street, but it could get no further, so the door of it flew open and some one jumped out and made her way like a crazy woman through the crush. Blind and rough and senseless as she was, those who recognized her made way for her, but when she began to struggle with the policeman at the fire-line, the officers told her to look

up, and men and women called out to her, "It's all right! See! Look! It's all right—he's got him!" She raised her frantic eyes and saw, she sank to her knees on the pavement and staring upward, quieted, for the first time began to weep. Grady had seen her as she came, and as she looked up he looked down. He slid softly to a sitting posture in the window and took Alec into his lap. "Hold on, old man," said he, somewhat irrelevantly, to the child.

Grady and the fireman who got to the window first were rather snubby to another fireman, who met them half way down and insisted upon helping them. When his feet touched the earth Grady began to feel foolish. There was a puddle over there by an engine and he wanted to lie down in it and go to sleep. He knew that he was in a good deal of pain somehow or other, also he seemed to be standing in a wide dark circle; then suddenly some one ran into this circle and came up to him. It was Miss Temple; they stood there face to face, her eyes all shiny and full of tears. He could see that she was trying to speak and could not. She had Alec in one arm. Suddenly she reached up and lifted her face and threw her free arm round Grady's neck and kissed him. For just one instant Grady came fully wide awake, and was aware to the very bone of everything; the fire and the night, the sea of faces, the danger he had been through, tempering his heart and the kiss of the young woman holding her child. Then it was all gone again, things became ordinary and then confused. "It's all right, Miss Temple," he told her, "why I had to bring him of course, of course, I had to." "Ah, yes, you Grady,"

he heard her say, "of course, you had to." And then the black circle tilted again and swayed, swung up and closed over his eyes. At the end of the night and the end of the world, Grady had fainted.

All things considered it was not remarkable that that threat of Mr. Lister's never got carried out: when the union would let him, and when he had got slowly, slowly well, Grady came back to Miss Temple's company and worked his cannon as of yore, and Alec rode with him again, and went to ball games with him, and picked up Grady's unseemly notions about obligations, just as he had done before.

And thus it came about that in the life of Charlotte Temple there was no marriage with Mr. Lister. Justly or unjustly, she had conceived a spite against that gentleman; she said she was afraid she was fussy, but she had a prejudice in favor of a husband who could look her property-boy in the face. When she became engaged to a grand young man who came out of Africa covered with medals, a sensational paper raked up the story of the fire, and included, among other pleasantries, the incident of the kiss. A confidential friend of Miss Temple's suburban school-days, who had become the head of a sort of Temple-æsthetics cult in the neighborhood, wrote to inquire if this statement were correct, and on being promptly informed in the affirmative, wrote again. Miss Temple read this second letter late one night sitting alone in her bedroom before a grate of glowing coals. The letter was warmly commendatory and sentimental, not to say gushing; it declared that nothing could have been nobler, nor more truly, poetically refined, than for

a famous actress, before a street full of people, to be carried away by gratitude, and kiss one of her mechanics. "Noblesse oblige!" ran this effusion. "Such a thing must have been shockingly against all your instincts and delicacies, and we think it all the finer because it must have been so intensely disagreeable to you—of course, dear girl, we all know that." Miss Temple paused and looked into the firelight; fully, clearly, she saw that moment—the dark, enormous, gusty, rowdy night and the flaming theatre which lighted it, the snorting engines, the huddled cars, the crowds, all commanded by the omnipotent firemen, among whom Grady alone moved as an equal; and she saw the bold young figure breathing life and death, bearing her the world in his arms, and then with his cross and curly head bowed down to hers. She sat very still; the light of her hearth dreamed over her white laces, her white hands, her glimmering rings, her little silk-shod feet, and a small, a mischievous and pensive smile came creeping and dimpling into her face; "It must have been so intensely disagreeable to you—of course, dear girl, we all know that."

"The devil they do!" said the lady softly.

ABOVE RUBIES

ABOVE RUBIES

I

SUSIE had pulled a chair in front of the bureau, and she revolved upon it as steadily as possible, looking into the mirror at the hang of her skirt. Susie was a most delicate and spirited little person, and looked only about twenty, though she was twenty-six. Her husband lolled on the hard and bulging sofa and fanned himself, for the day was hot. Climax, the fox terrier, was getting too fat, and he also felt the heat; he panted patiently on the floor in the midst of a crumbling desert of dog-biscuit. The baby, in her night-gown for coolness' sake, tottered amiably but unsteadily near the dog; every now and then her father would lean out from the sofa, and with a swoop of his fan between her fingers and her opening mouth, would intercept a piece of dog-biscuit and wave it to a distance. Susie, expertly revolving in her fresh white dress and deciding in a capable glance that it hung perfectly, had something like a flash of realization that an ingenue, however prosperous, is a little excessive in allowing herself so many encumbrances. She jumped down and took up her hat. Susie was going to make the round of the theatrical agencies, as she did three days a week; she was looking, with a growing desperation, for an engagement.

Four years ago, before Miss Suzanne Grayce had married Mr. Walter Bates, she had been one of the most

promising ingenues in the profession. No one had been quite as promising since, except perhaps this new girl, Mabel Rose, who seemed not only to have taken Susie's place but to walk directly ahead of her, closing the gate of every opportunity. Well, she herself had once walked into the stronghold of success, and she had done it so smoothly, so easily, that success had seemed the only thing natural to her; she had lived in a kind of pleasant, progressive game in which she had always gone higher with each move, and in which she was to go much higher still. Then, in a mood of thinking that she was living rather extravagantly "for a young girl," she had allowed herself to be advised out of her pretty hotel into a blowzy boarding-house, and there she had met Walter Bates and had fallen in love with him and married him. He was out of an engagement and in debt, but he was very gentle and good-looking and he had excellent intentions; his intentions were still excellent, and he had kept his good looks and his gentleness. Susie was now also in debt and out of an engagement.

This state of affairs was not due to any spiritual deficiency in Mr. Bates. He tried very hard; he had some small talent for playing parts, but none whatever for getting them. Whenever he was out of work he realized this to such an extent that he was apt to become quite pale about it. Unfortunately, for any claim upon sympathy, he was apt at the same time to become a little puffy. If he did not get fat, he at least spread, unappealingly. So that, in a time of such poignant uselessness as the present, he continued to lounge upon the sofa and to grow paler and puffier from moment to mo-

ment. An unquenchable amusement at the eccentricities of life lurked, aimlessly, in his expression.

"Wallie," said his wife, suddenly observing him as she drew on her gloves, "I do wish I could afford you some fencing lessons. You need something, I'm sure."

"While you are wishing, Susie," said Mr. Bates, "wish that I could afford some for myself."

His wife looked at him with a fond frown. "Don't worry," said she brightly. "If only one of us can make some money it doesn't matter which one it is."

"Not at all," said Mr. Bates. "Angh-angh, Geraldine—drop it! It would be a good deal of a luxury to me personally, to support my family myself, and who am I to afford luxuries? I don't know if you want her to swallow that button, dear, but she's doing it."

Geraldine was deprived of her button and placed upon the bed. Her mother poked at her, and rolled her over and over until she screamed with joy, and then suddenly deserted her and went over and stood beside the sofa. She had taken up her parasol and stood stroking the sofa with the point; she was growing rather pale herself.

Finally she said: "Wallie, do you feel quite comfortable about going down to dinner here?" He did not answer, and she quivered out with: "We shall have to pay Mrs. Lexis. She's been very patient and she'll have to have it." She stopped again, and then: "Walter, if I don't get an engagement pretty soon, what will become of us?" He had not and could not have anything to say, but he stooped for the handkerchief she had dropped, and she took it from him with a little

shiver. "Do you think," she cried, and her voice tore on the words into a furtive sob, "do you think I shall have to sell my ruby bracelet?"

"You may even get the engagement to-day," said he, and smiled upon her.

She remembered that perhaps she might, and remembering also the charming little figure, impeccably arrayed, which had revolved before her in the glass, she took heart, brightening at him and giving his sleeve a small twist of confidence as she moved away. He got up and opened the door for her and, "Of course," said she, with a punctilious loyalty, "if I don't get anything to-day, you may get something to-morrow.

He looked at her a moment in amused surprise, and then with a sudden gravity took her face a little formally and distantly between his finger tips and, stooping, kissed her.

"I'll take care of the baby!" he called jauntily after her.

II

Susie's spurt of elation carried her down Broadway and up the stairs that lead to Mrs. Meade's agency. There it deserted her, immediately and altogether.

It was Monday morning, so the agency was very full and the crowded room was hot, with the sticky, humid heat of the late summer. Beyond the low wire fence which protected the authorities from invasion there was a little breathing space; the bold and hardy pushed up to the fence, made themselves heard over the click of the typewriters beyond and were answered by shakes of the head from haughty employees within. The agent

herself, Mrs. Meade, was immured with a manager in her private office. Susie saw that the women were greatly in the majority, and her sense of individuality failed her just when she most required it; she seemed to sink indistinguishably into a sea of needy ingenues. She stood back against the wall, fanning herself with her handkerchief and rather aggressively getting her breath after running upstairs. Susie had been in the habit of pitying girls thus trying to appear at ease, as she had once pitied their elaborate toilettes—elaborated in order to hide the indications of pretense and make-shift which had always frayed Susie's nerves. "Oh," she remembered once having said to Walter, "oh, an anxious-looking dress! I never could endure that!" Those were the days when she had plenty of offers, but refused all which did not include him. She wondered, now, what sort of dress, what sort of anxieties, she might presently be obliged to endure. There is nothing like standing about agencies to wilt the starch out of superiority.

Mrs. Meade herself, when she finally came forth, was not nearly so haughty as her employees. She said, "Good morning," and, "No, nothing, not a thing, my dear," to each person in turn, and when one loquacious girl said that the weather was so hot it took all the curl out of one's hair, she said: "Oh, don't curl it, dearie! Try the water-wave!" She shook hands with Susie, whom she remembered having told to come in to-day, and said at once: "Oh, they've filled that part, my dear; yes, they've engaged Grace Weston." There was nothing for Susie but to look as if she didn't care and to get away as quickly as possible. At the next agency

it was the same story, and at the next and the next. Susie knew people in every office, and she was aware that her smile of greeting was becoming forced. She hated herself for it, and yet she knew she was losing her nerve; persistence seemed so useless and the world so impenetrable a wall. Some of the stairways leading to the offices bore upon each step a sign which said, "No loiterers, tramps, or peddlers allowed in this building," and Susie began to creep past these signs with a certain sense of guilt. At the most successful of the agencies she glanced through the door and beheld many thriving-looking Thespians, elect ladies in rocking-chairs, fanning themselves and discussing new plays. Susie did not see how she could face the cold eye of an aristocracy to which she had once belonged; she faltered on the threshold, then: "No, I can't go in there!" she admitted to her sinking heart, and, turning, fled.

At the corner of the street she was hailed by a girl she knew, a Miss Marsh, Victoria Marsh, who got pretty good engagements now through being such a friend of those prosperous Farnums, and they loitered together for a moment in front of a shop devoted to confectionery and ice-cream. Miss Marsh said that she was waiting for Eddie Clark; he had gone in somewhere to get some cigarettes. She managed to convey a certain proprietorship of Eddie by the tone in which she mentioned him, which was re-enforced by his having left her to straggle alone in the street, and she presently began telling Susie how near he had come to getting that splendid part in Granger's Number Two Company of "Alaska," only Norman Lawrence had gone up the day before Eddie was to sign and offered to go for half

Eddie's salary, and Granger had taken him. Susie felt that beating of the blood about her temples which she always suffered under contact with something treacherous. "Lawrence ought to be turned out of the profession," she declared, with more violence than becomes an ingenue. She had always rather disliked Eddie, but now she felt quite fond of him. "That sort of thing," —she said and shut her teeth.

"It's awful," said Miss Marsh, "and people are getting more like that every day; Helen Graham's own sister worked her out of a part last week by telling the manager Helen was subject to laryngitis. The way people in this business are beginning to scheme and go on, you'd think they were all managers. What do you go with yourself, Susie?"

"I haven't signed," said Susie.

"Well, come in here and have some soda," cried Miss Marsh, cheeringly.

"Oh, thanks, I guess I—"

At this moment there flashed out of the confectioner's a young girl in pink organdy with roses in her hands. She was followed by two nice-looking boys, one carrying her parasol and the other some vague thing of pinky flutters. Sailing past, radiant, the girl smiled to Susie and waved her hand.

Miss Marsh exclaimed: "Wasn't that Mabel Rose?"

"Yes," said Susie; "isn't she pretty?"

"They say that in this new piece of Jervis's she's got the greatest part ever was written. Nice for Kate Erskine when she's to star in it."

"Jervis writes good parts," said Susie softly.

"And good parts make good actresses," Miss Marsh announced. "Well, Eddie."

Eddie said: "Well, girls," and that he had just seen old Emmons, who had told him if he came round at three to-morrow there might be something doing. On the strength of this statement Eddie wanted to know if Victoria, if the girls, would come somewhere and have a drink, but Miss Marsh plucked him sharply up to the ice-cream standard and they went into the confectioner's.

As they sat at their ease nibbling the lady fingers with which Eddie had delicately provided them, Miss Marsh said to Susie: "It's you ought to be playing this part Mabel Rose has got."

"Oh, I'm not so particular," Susie laughed. "Most any part would do for me."

"Well, if that's the way you feel, you'll never get anything," Miss Marsh austerely commented. "I don't believe you've got any push, Susie. You ought to go to see everybody and you ought to put on a good front." She looked a little deprecatingly at Susie's mild white dress. "How about your—have you still got—oh, there it is! What do you hide it for?" She pointed sternly, and Susie shook her ruby bracelet free of her sleeve.

"Well, I thought—in the daytime."

"Not at all," said Miss Marsh, whose naturally concerned and conscientious spirit seemed especially on edge that day. "You want to wear it flash out so as to show people that you've got it yet. People never want to give engagements to people unless they look as if they didn't want them. Have you been around to the agencies this morning?"

"Yes, to Mrs. Meade's, and to Spaulding's, and to Paul's, and—"

"To Miss Reagle's?"

"No," hesitated Susie. "I—I just couldn't go in there, so many people—"

"Well, she has the best of everything. You ought to go there. Things won't come to you, you know. You ought to *go* there and *stay* there. It's just cowardice not to, Susie."

"Have some more cream, Miss Grayce," said Eddie Clark.

"I want Susie to promise me she'll go to Miss Reagle's right away," insisted the strenuous Miss Marsh. "She can break the ice by asking if there's any mail for her. She ought to go there; you can never tell what might happen."

Susie felt that her friend was right, and she decided to make use of this first aid to the self-conscious; she would at least pretend to look for mail at Miss Reagle's. Fortified by Mr. Clark's hospitality, she walked, as soon as she was alone, directly back to Miss Reagle's, and once arrived upon the threshold she took a deep breath, thrust forth her ruby bracelet, and entered the office.

The mail-box was behind the railing, and Susie pointed to it and said to a proud minion: "May I see if there's anything for me?" The minion stared blankly, but handed her the letters, and Susie ran them over. The door of the inner office was open; Susie could hear Miss Reagle's voice; and for a moment her eyes met those of the manager to whom Miss Reagle was talking. He was a Mr. Hendricks, for whom Susie had once played.

She made him a little bow, returned the mail, and walked out. When she was half-way downstairs she heard someone call her name, and turning she observed the proud minion hanging over the banister and entreating her: "Miss Grayce! Miss Grayce! Will you come back a minute, please?"

Susie, puzzled, but pliable, returned. A kind young lady at the typewriter said: "Just step into the office, please." At this moment the manager came out of the office. "How are you, Miss Grayce?" he said. "Where have you hidden yourself all this while?" He went on without waiting for an answer; Susie, for the first time in many a weary day, stepped into the inner office and Miss Reagle motioned her to a chair.

"My dear," said Miss Reagle, "it's a good thing you came in! I was just going to send for you. Hendricks was in here looking for an ingenue, and I mentioned your name." Susie remembered the surprised recognition growing into attention in Hendrick's glance and she demurely cast down her eyes. "They want somebody right away for Mabel Rose's part. They're rehearsing now."

"For Mabel Rose's part!" To Susie her own voice seemed to come from a long way off. She was so surprised that she scarcely knew if she was even pleased. It was as though somebody had handed her the moon.

"Yes," said Miss Reagle, "I'll give you a note to the stage-manager. But don't go to the stage door. Hand in the note at the box-office; they'll put you in front somewhere, to watch the rehearsal. Are you a quick study?" Susie nodded. Coherency still swam beyond her grasp.

"For you'll have to get up in it like lightning. There are so many openings to-night and to-morrow night they've deferred theirs till Wednesday. They've played the piece three nights out of town, and they're not satisfied with Rose, and they've grabbed this chance to make a change. Somebody will take your card in to Wallis—he's putting on the piece—and as soon as rehearsal's over you can settle everything with him and Hendricks. They furnish the clothes."

"Have you any idea what I ought to ask them, Miss Reagle?" asked Susie, dropping toward the earth.

"Well, of course, you can ask them seventy-five, but you're a fool if you stick at salary, child. It's the chance of your life." Beginning to write the note, she said: "You will have a rehearsal with Wallis or with Potter, the stage manager, directly the other rehearsal's over." Finishing the note, she handed it to Susie. "You go right round there now, my dear," said she; "they're expecting you."

Susie went "right round there," preserving while indoors a tremulously radiant decorum, but, as soon as she reached the sidewalk, she flew. Her feet seemed scarcely to move of themselves; the air seemed to sparkle. Her spirit at once sang and shivered in an ecstasy of nervousness; when she spoke she feared that her heart would tremble in her voice. Then the thought of returning home, of kissing the baby, of telling Walter—ah, of telling Walter!—softly flooded her with warmth. Her eyes filled with tears. She flitted up the lobby of the theatre and gave in the note at the box-office.

III

Seated at the back of the large auditorium, Susie eagerly surveyed the peopled stage. She could not find Mr. Jervis, the author, but Mr. Potter, the stage manager, sat at the prompt-table fumbling with the manuscript; Wallis, the producer, the Stage-Manager Extraordinary, sprang here and there with impassioned, shirt-sleeved gestures, correcting, expounding, arranging. The back door was open and the rear of the stage was gray in the daylight; forward, by the prompt-table, a big bunch light shed a warm yellow mistiness. As the actors advanced into this limited brightness Susie endeavored to make sure of their identities; suddenly a girl, a familiar, airy figure, came into the magic circle. She turned her face to the light, and Susie recognized Mabel Rose. Susie's heart gave a sick little jump. "They haven't told her!"

It was now abundantly clear why she had been sent, with so mysterious a hush, through the front part of the house. Miss Rose still expected to play the part. They had not dared to discharge her before they had acquired Susie, and, moreover, it was invaluable to the newcomer to see the part rehearsed. Susie's hot scorn of such tactics was quickly cooled by her helplessness beneath them, and after a single throb of indignation she set to work seriously at absorbing the rehearsal.

But as beneath her scrutiny the action slowly cleared and settled, she became aware of something truly terrifying. Miss Rose was unsatisfactory in the part not because she was bad in it, but because she was too good. To her successor this was appalling but indisputable.

And it was all the author's fault. Commissioned to write a play for Katherine Erskine, his star part was wood and putty; he had fallen in love with his ingenue as he wrote her, and she had taken life and breath, she had grown into beauty and laughter beneath his hands. He would always insist that the part be well played. Miss Erskine, with less frankness, would see to it that it was not. The management, bedeviled and befogged, would hang fire between the two. Yet, it was Miss Erskine most certainly who was to be exploited. To keep the position one must never play the part for all it was worth, and innocent Miss Rose, tiptoe with the ecstasy of triumphant work, knew no other way to play it.

But Susie knew. The situation was not pleasant, but Susie believed herself mistress of it. She leaned forward, "spotting" breathlessly the points that she was sure pricked Miss Erskine sorely and must be blunted; the other points than the author, the stage manager, the whole set of bunglers would insist upon, and which she would drive home at any cost. Here was a laugh that could be lost, there was a round of applause that could be stifled. Let them go, she could spare them! What, what a bag of tricks there still remained! The darling part seemed, like a jewel, to sparkle the more, the more it was cut. Miss Rose, amid the intricacies of the situation, rode high on her popular personality; but Susie, the competent, the experienced, the expert, smiled to herself demurely, and knew her way.

The rehearsal drew toward its close, Susie still observing it with mounting ardor. Then she heard it dismissed, and the call given for a dress-rehearsal the next

night. She shrank from seeing the stage manager call Miss Rose aside as she would have shrunk from it had he carried a knife in his hand, and between the horror of this and the dread of the call which the next few minutes would make upon her own resources, she crouched back in her seat, a little sick. And, immediately, she observed Miss Rose pausing at the stage door, flaring out her pink beruffled parasol and blithely issuing forth, with at least three of the young men of the company prancing at her heels. Still she had not been told! They must mean to send her a note. Susie's heart was getting higher and higher, thicker and thicker in her throat. She could spare no more thought for poor Miss Rose. In another moment—oh, if she had only had the part for a few days! If only she had had those three nights on the road! A hand touched her on the shoulder. A man's voice said: "Miss Grayce, Mr. Potter says will you please step back onto the stage?" The young man was waiting to escort her; she shut her eyes, swallowed, smiled, rose, acquiesced inaudibly, and followed him.

IV

Late that afternoon Miss Folsom and Mr. Potter accompanied Susie across the stage and up the stairs to the manager's office, with a smiling flutter more significant than trumpets. Mr. Hendricks was sitting at his desk, and Miss Erskine gave Susie a caressing push over the threshold and then addressed Mr. Hendricks over Susie's head. "Here's your little ingenue."

Mr. Hendricks caught her tone, glanced at the corroborative face of Mr. Potter, and then turned cordially to

Susie. "Wallis and I saw part of your rehearsal," said he; "I guess we can consider things settled." He drew a chair face to face with his, and waved a friendly hand. "Sit down here." Susie sat down; Potter continued to hang about the threshold; Miss Erskine wandered discreetly to a desk across the room and began to read a newspaper she found there. Susie and her fate faced each other. "Well," said Mr. Hendricks indulgently, "you understand you haven't got much time to get up in this part, Miss Grayce, but we'll help you out the best we can. Now, how much salary are you going to hold me up for?"

"Seventy-five dollars," said Susie.

"Correct," said Mr. Hendricks. Susie settled herself in her chair. It seemed a facile world.

"Now about the clothes. We furnish the dresses. But for shoes and gloves and so on—" Susie opened her mouth and hastily closed it. Mr. Hendricks looked sharply at her. "Do you want an advance?" he asked. Susie faltered. He took out a check-book, wrote and handed her a check. "Well, I was going to say, you're a little bit smaller than Miss Rose, but we'll have one of Mme. Durand's ladies down here at the dress-rehearsal, and she can take up each dress while it's on you; everything'll be ready for you all right for Wednesday night."—"Everything'll be ready for you." After the tyranny of preparation for the weekly change of bill in the stock company where Susie had last played, after all the grinding economies and contrivances of the summer, here was peace, plenty, balm to one's self-respect—here was high life. She put the check in her pocketbook.

Mr. Hendricks was saying: "I'll get Potter to give

you a copy of the manuscript—and do you want to rehearse some to-night?"

"Oh," cried Susie, "if I may."

"You got anything on for to-night, Miss Erskine?" Hendricks called out. "Could Miss Grayce come and run over the lines with you awhile? She and Potter?"

"Oh, why, to be sure she can," Miss Erskine sweetly responded. "Come at about eight, my dear."

"You're sure you oughtn't to take this evening to study?" Mr. Hendricks asked. "How much do you think you can be up in, by the morning?"

"Oh, I'll take all night to study," Susie laughed. She made a hasty calculation. Wallie would sit up with her and hear her the part; he could make black coffee and keep them both awake. "There won't be any trouble about my lines," said she.

"Isn't she a treasure!" cried Miss Erskine.

"Well," said Mr. Hendricks, "you come down about ten to-morrow, and you and Potter can hammer at it all day. I 'spose you couldn't come down awhile, Miss Erskine?"

"Um-umh, n-no, I don't think I could. The dress-rehearsal is not until eight. Not that I shall dress, of course. Still, I've got to have some rest."

"Well," said Mr. Hendricks again, "I guess we can depend on Miss Grayce, anyhow."

Miss Erskine rapturously reiterated: "Isn't she a little wonder!"

"You see, I know her of old," said Mr. Hendricks. "She played an ingenue lead with me in 'Vermont Girls.'" He turned to Susie. "I was telling Miss Reagle a while ago that that was the last part you'd

played in New York, but she said no, you made your biggest hit the spring afterward in 'Men and Money.'"

"So she did," exclaimed Miss Erskine, "that was when we wore those great long trains; she looked like a doll in one, I remember. Of course, I was nothing but a child then myself."

At this point Mr. Wallis appeared, embracing all salutations in one curt nod. Susie, who was speaking mechanically, continued: "The very last thing I played in New York was Dora in Brinton's 'Kansas.'" She had said the same thing that summer to managers and agents a dreary score of times, and had not won a flicker of recognition, but now Mr. Potter smiled propitiatingly and said: "I saw you in that—Mr. Staples, the treasurer, said to me just now as you came in: 'Isn't that the little girl that played in Kansas?'" "And I," chimed in Mr. Wallis, "I said 'yes, if any one should ask you.'"

Susie stood there breathing quickly, her eyes brightening from one speaker to another. It seemed as if to-day's engagement had acted like a calcium on her career. No effort of hers for months had been able to bring her past out of the shadow of her obscure present, but now it seemed as if people had been only waiting to recognize her; all of a sudden they remembered her perfectly, remembered the successes she had made, the very dresses she had worn; she was as well known again as if she had never left Broadway. The change of air was welcome to her; she drank it in greedily.

"And wore my hair in long curls," Miss Erskine was saying; "they used to tell me—"

"All right," said Hendricks; "then you understand

about everything, Miss Grayce? You be at Miss Erskine's at eight this evening. Here—first, second, fourth; where's the third act, Potter? Oh, here's the manuscript. To-morrow, here at the theatre, at ten. Dress-rehearsal to-morrow night, at eight."

"Yes, sir," said Susie.

Potter began to cough. "Don't you think," he intervened, "we might give Miss Grayce till a little later, till we have got as far as—ah—" His face was drawn almost into a point with the effort to be significant.

"Later!" Susie cried, "and with dresses I've never seen! Why, I'll be here at six o'clock!"

"Oh, Lord, no!" cried Miss Erskine; "Rose 'ud be onto us in a minute!"

A dreadful silence followed this extraordinary remark. Everyone was excessively jarred, but Susie, on whom the real blow had fallen, was in the grasp of something cold and stiff; she felt neither hope nor dread, only a horrid pounding of the heart. So, it was not an ordinary case of discharging one girl and engaging another. They were still intentionally deceiving Miss Rose; they were going to play her some trick at which she, Susie, was to connive. She put out one hand and gripped the edge of Mr. Hendrick's desk. "You have not discharged Miss Rose?" she asked.

"Miss Grayce!" Hendricks reprovingly turned his back on her and lighted a cigar. He said over his shoulder: "That's about up to the management."

"No," said Susie.

Miss Erskine cried out: "Well, I never."

"No," persisted Susie, "we can't both be engaged for the part. Who is?"

At this Miss Erskine came forward, with a laugh, and threw a protective arm round Susie's shoulders. "Oh, see here. What are we all stewing about? Little Miss Grayce only wants to be sure she's got the part, and in this profession I don't blame her." The managerial brow cleared; Hendricks believed Miss Erskine's suggestion, and he allowed her to go on talking. "Why, look here, Miss Grayce, it'll be all right. You can be perfectly sure she's not going to play that part the first night in New York. If the worst comes to the worst, we can give her two weeks' salary and let her go. Only we should have such an awful time afterward with Jervis. His being out of town makes it just right."

"Out of town!" cried Susie. "He won't be here till the dress-rehearsal? Oh, he won't be here *for* the dress-rehearsal."

"Well, what does he want of a dress-rehearsal?" Something in Susie's voice had startled her. She threw her parasol angrily on the desk. "Hasn't he seen us three nights on the road? He's gone to Boston for the opening of his other piece. My God, does she think I'm keeping him away!"

"Miss Erskine!" Hendricks interrupted.

She recalled her amiability. "But we shan't have to do anything. Rose'll go of herself fast enough when she finds her best scene cut out—" A slight general movement gave her pause. "Oh, well, of course, it won't really be cut—"

"Miss Erskine, when you've finished confiding in Miss Grayce—" Hendrick's tone cowed her a little. She stood muttering. He looked at Susie. "You will meet Miss Erskine at her apartment at eight this evening."

Susie stood still. So that was what they depended on! With the author determined to have Miss Rose play the part, they were prevented from discharging her without notice, and so, at this last rehearsal, conducted without him, they meant to put upon her this extreme affront, this trumped-up cause for a quarrel they had resolved to pick, a quarrel which would force her to give up the part, which would force her to discharge herself. And at this late date they would not dare to quarrel with her unless, now, Susie swore herself in with the plot and stood ready. She was not accepting an empty place, she was crowding out someone else—like Norman Lawrence, like Helen Graham's sister. She knew the verdict of Broadway, high and low—had herself pronounced it many a time. Still resting passive, she looked at Miss Erskine, then at Potter, then at Wallis, at Hendricks. She saw what she was doing. Her pause was rousing in these people an implacable offense. Suddenly she was among enemies. And they and their allies were the masters of her life, dealers of bread to her and to her baby; behind them the dreadful barriers of the great Trust stretched from horizon to horizon of her world. A favorite phrase of Walter's rattled across her mind—"It's up to you, Susie."

"I'm sorry," she said. Her little face went white and the life withered in it, but she got the check out of her purse, and laid it with the manuscript upon the desk. "I wish—I—could have done it." She smiled faintly at them and gravely inclined her head as a farewell. Though it was she who had won out, she went meekly from the room and down the stairs; she fairly ran across the stage. But in the doorway, where Miss Rose had

hoisted her pink parasol, she paused a moment. After the dark theatre, there was a kind of tawdy squalor in the day, in the hot glare of the late sun. Among those shadows she had felt a horrid sensation that the world had come to an end; here, the trouble was that it had not. The surging, snatching terrors of that real life to which she was returning streamed before her in a choking tide; she stood for a moment clinging to the door-frame and then plunged forward into the street.

V

In the little boarding-house where Susie lived, the fumes of dinner were already straggling through the halls, that grew dingier and dingier in their sultry dusk. Half-way up the stairs a disheveled infant rose from the step where it had been sitting, and with an ardent snuffle cast itself about Susie's knees. Geraldine was a heavy girl, but Susie picked her up and staggered to the landing with her. Here they were met by Mr. Bates, pale, perspiring, and in his shirt-sleeves. "It's extraordinary how she manages to get away from one," said he, and he took the crushy and sticky bundle out of Susie's arms.

In their own room, when the door was shut and Geraldine once more relegated to the bed, Susie placed the submissive Mr. Bates in the rocker and stood humbly before him. She lifted a strained little voice above the yelps and leaps of Climax, and told her story. Walter beheld her, waiting, as it were, the verdict. He stood up and tapped her on the shoulder. "Well, Mrs. Bates," said he, "I am glad that you consider yourself something besides a meal-ticket. I am subject to better moments my own

self. Oh, for God's sake, don't cry! Susie, don't cry! Don't you know you're rather small, dear, to provide fortunes for the Bateses? What? Well, cry—well, cry away then, honey." He felt with a deep sting of tenderness the despair in which she clung to him, and then he made out she was gasping with big sobs: "What —ever—will—be—come—of—us?"

"Oh, now," said he, "you can't possibly prove that I shan't get something. There are still the dark, unfathomed caves of the stock companies. And if I don't, there is still—" he stopped.

She pulled a little away from him, and then with an "Oh, yes," she took off her ruby bracelet and put it in his hand. "Take it, to-morrow, so we can pay Mrs. Lexis. But, Wallie, don't try to sell it. Pawn it. If," she was still crying very hard, "if you *should* get anything to do, maybe we can get it back!"

And Mr. Bates replied, "Oh, sure to."

AN INDISCRETION OF HIS MAJESTY

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THE threat that had come with the dawn had grown as the day grew, so that even in the early morning the country lay exhausted beneath the conquering heat. By breakfast time the long trip that stretched before a certain theatrical company seemed unbearable, an impossible thing—to be averted somehow, anyhow, if only by some awful miracle of nature.

But at ten o'clock balm descended. For at about that time various of the actors, straggling reluctantly into the little railway station, discovered that an accident had happened, dazzling though dreadful: by some awe-inspiring blunder "His Majesty's" special car had been left behind! His Majesty's car! the star's car! That is to say, his rich region, his plenteous space, his privacy and peace and very royalty, secluded within which, remote, august, he was want to luxuriate and keep cool. And now it was gone! For the worst jump of the season—a jump which any listener would have hitherto supposed to be arranged between His Majesty and Providence because of a special spite they had against the company—here was His Majesty reduced to the level of the common herd! The herd began to wink and to admit that Providence might be on its side. For the blessed privilege of seeing the great man's impotence, of watching him fume and rage, yes, and swelter and stew with the rest of them, and grow grimy, too, and

perhaps fall asleep with his mouth open, for this gratification the members of his company entered willingly, even joyously, the fiery furnace of that western accommodation train.

His Majesty entered with them, his acute consciousness of their pleasantries stiffening his gait. There were few things in life of which His Majesty was not conscious, and at present he knew perfectly well the picture of balked privilege which he presented to a gloating proletariat. The breath of nervous ill-temper stirred his nostrils. But, perhaps unhappily, his frozen demeanor could not chill the atmosphere.

The train was very late, of course, and crowded. There was some sort of German excursion which alone pretty well filled it, and the newcomers scrunched their way through popcorn and peanut-shells in a scramble for seats. His Majesty was too self-conscious to scramble, but the divinity which hedges stars saved him a whole seat. His heavy man sat crowded onto the arm of one at a little distance. His Majesty knew that the heavy man saw the vacant place, and hated him for his diffidence. "Am I such an ogre?" thought His Majesty, and left the man to his discomfort.

The train steamed and bumped slowly forward, stopping to take on coal, or to take on water, or whenever it saw a couple of sheds, or whenever it got to the middle of a nice, open, sunny field. Whenever it stopped or started, the old cars heaved and groaned and grumbled; through the open windows hot waves of dusty air tossed the cinders that seemed cleaner than the velvet of the seats. Stars might sit as tight as they would, but the atmosphere, the stain of the place, was pervasive, in-

escapable. At the rear of the car a little girl, still a baby, pricked to tempest by an insufferable universe, quarreled with her guardian, emitting loud howls, and, subsiding, was allowed to run clattering up and down the aisle. There were a great many other children, from whom the fathers in their heavy best clothes seemed hopelessly alienated; the weary mothers began to get out lunch baskets. The noise, jar and grime, the rank, evil heat, all the horrors of compressed humanity, sickened His Majesty with a sense of futile pity and distaste.

Out under that scorching sky, and closer, too, beside the track, men were at work. His Majesty, always disdainful of his fastidious luxury, was tragically aware of their moiled dog-weariness and felt the rebellion and oppression of it as if it were his own. All his sympathies lay that way, with toil, with pain, and with the honorable stupidity of crushing labor; on the stage no one else could play them as he could. He had no sympathy whatever with the stupidity of his pretty young leading woman who was making herself extremely conspicuous by challenging public admiration for the vivacity of her badinage with the heavy man; there was even a moment when His Majesty feared that she was about to break into song. She whispered something to two of the actors, who burst out laughing, and His Majesty wondered if they were laughing at him! As a matter of fact, nobody dared to tell him a joke nor offer him a sandwich. Not for nothing did His Majesty conceal, beneath the troublesome unconventionality of a moustache, the sensitiveness of a mouth that was his best feature. He concealed it so well that perhaps His Majesty's life was a little homesick in the world: a place

with which he had never been able quite to identify himself. And so he pretended to read a newspaper.

He was soon interrupted by a sound at his elbow; the lately obstreperous infant was standing at the end of his seat, and now laid upon it's edge a small, moist, pudgy hand. His Majesty looked at her through his half-shut eyes. Through very wide eyes indeed, light blue and of a marble calm, the child judicially regarded him.

She was an inexpressibly German child, with firm, red cheeks, a solid figure and a large, round head. The absence of her hat displayed side locks gathered into diminutive pig-tails and fastened on the top of her head with a large blue bow, while, around her fat little warm neck, indefinite lengths of blonde hair straggled vaguely. She wore a brown cashmere dress much too long for her, trimmed with rows and bows of light blue ribbon; in her hand she clutched a few dusty dandelions. Her grave, ruminating face was still flushed with past tragedy, and damp circles still emphasized her crumpled eyelids. There was apparent in her clumsy grace an intangible German something of innocence, goodness, femininity.

She regarded His Majesty for a long time in meditative silence, and then stepped close to him and laid her hand on his knee. His Majesty was embarrassed, for he was afraid of children. And suddenly this one spoke.

"What did you say?" asked His Majesty. The child tried again, but what she said was in baby German, and His Majesty could not understand. There was a suggestion, however, in the inclination of her plump little figure, and His Majesty vaguely remembered having

seen children standing about on the seats of cars. He laid his hand questioningly on the red velvet of the seat and the child instantly held up her arms. His Majesty drew himself nervously together, seized her with a grip of iron below the armpits and the next moment she stood beside him, safe! His Majesty sat back with a long, relieved breath.

It was the window which the little girl desired, not the mere seat. With a grave and gentle cumbrousness she grasped His Majesty's shoulder and planted her sturdy little foot upon his leg. This bearing the test, she stood a single triumphant instant on his knees. At that moment the car gave a jolt, and down plumped the baby, with wide-eyed serenity, full into His Majesty's lap. There she sat and there she stayed. There, from the favored spot of her selection, she radiated moist and sticky content. Her solemn, joyous eyes followed the landscape.

After a while, amused members of His Majesty's company began to nudge each other and make signals of wonderment; the comedian commented, "Generally, eats 'em alive." His Majesty gave no sign. The leading lady, desirous of making a particularly gracious picture, knelt down to play with the baby and spoke sweetly to her. The baby regarded her long and seriously, and, having evidently found her wanting, returned calmly to the study of nature. The car heaved forward, and the leading lady went away. His Majesty remained passive and listened with what he supposed to be an impenetrably matter-of-fact expression to the remarks which the child occasionally addressed to him in her imperfect German; she required no answer of him, ex-

cept a smile. With the stub of a finger she pointed out to him, in utter confidence of his appreciation, an occasional cow, duck or black dog. She propped herself against his breast with her little cashmered elbow, and loved the world. And presently His Majesty did a tremendous thing. Perhaps to steady her, or to save her from sliding to a fall, he put his arm around the waistless little body and drew it closer to him. The earth was not shaken by this event, nor the baby astounded.

It grew hotter and hotter in the crowded car, and the odor of peanuts became more and more aggressive. The fat little child with her sticky mouth and hands sank more and more heavily against His Majesty, and bye-and-bye the lids began to droop over her sweet light eyes. Then, with a little round sigh, her head pillowed itself upon that elegant waistcoat and she slept.

His Majesty sat still for a long time and looked at nothing. The car shook and rumbled and swore and smoked. In the midst of her sleep, the child lifted her hand with a sort of fretfulness, and waved it vaguely across her forehead. With a fierce pang of self-reproach he saw that the sunlight struck full in the baby's face. He put up his free arm, the one nearest the window, and tried to pull down the wooden blind, but found it, as usual, immovable. He was terrified at not being able to do something quickly.

Above all, he mustn't wake her. There was a newspaper on the back of the next seat, and, by infinite precautions, he got it into his grasp without disaster. With the fingers of both hands, he pressed it into something fan-shaped and manageable, and held it before

the window like a screen. He was indescribably soothed to find it successful, though his elbow was propped on layers of grime and cinders, and, as time went on, his unshielded arm and hand quivered in the sun. The day waxed to its full strength, the arm round the child grew first prickly and then numb, while from her own little hand her withered dandelions slipped to the floor, and slowly perished there. And still His Majesty possessed his soul and his heart was quiet in him.

At about three o'clock a stir followed one of the conductor's spasms of announcements; fathers began to collect bundles, and mothers to worry their children's headgear. A young German woman smilingly approached His Majesty, and laid a heavy, gentle hand on the child's shoulder. "T'ank you, sir," she said, and drew the sleepy little figure to her own arms.

The child half awoke, and the mother was turning away with her, when she felt His Majesty's detaining fingers on her arm. He had gathered up the handful of dead dandelions, and he extended this treasure towards its owner with a slight, grave inflection. The child suddenly sat up, wriggled, and descended to the earth with something of a flop. She took the flowers out of His Majesty's hand, but her look still lingered on his serious, questioning smile. Suddenly she thrust them back again, and, holding up her face, threw herself into His Majesty's arms. His Majesty bent the big, black head that people were fond of saying was too large for his hat, and she covered his mouth and cheeks with damp, little, vigorous, emphatic kisses.

The car was nearly empty after the excursionists had gone. What tired travelers remained were quieter,

though still, out in those heavy fruitful fields, the work of the world went on. Even there the torpid delirium of mid-afternoon began to weaken, and the throttled land to breathe more freely. The day's tyranny was gradually nearing its death, and at last the end of the journey loomed a tangible thing, soon to be reached. But still His Majesty immovably regarded a landscape that he did not see, and the blossoms of the little dead weeds were still closed in his hand.

THE CANDLE'S FLAME

THE CANDLE'S FLAME

"'TIS here!"

"'Tis here!"

"'Tis gone!"

Griscom, the chief of English dramatic critics, had crossed the Atlantic to see Miss Valliant in her new play. The play was called in this translation "The Water-Lily"; Griscom had seen its première in France as well as its London production and he was fresh from its two hundredth performance in Berlin; it was a poetic tragedy with many lighter moods of fantastic and ethereal mirth, and though these were popularized to the general by a riot of scenic display the critic was curious to see just which of its qualities carried farthest in the new glaring country which he had never before visited, where they were already giving its name to champagnes and patent medicines, and where the rush for seats was so great that the police had to be called in to keep order at the box-office. Yet it was not really the play which had brought Griscom to New York, but the fact that he had never seen Sophia Valliant act. Miss Valliant! Sophia Valliant! the great Sophia!—after all her triumphal visits to London! It seemed impossible, but some perverse fate had always kept them apart.

Conceive then with what a shock he heard on landing that she had been ill, had suffered heart-attacks of such violence that there had been danger of her losing some

performances. It seemed like fate again, but, no, they told him, though the pain had been so acute that her understudy had been kept up to the mark day and night lest Miss Valliant should be unable to finish an act, her wonderful vitality had won out. She was well again and so triumphantly that she was almost young again.

Griscom was to view the performance from the box of that celebrated old comédienne retired, Mrs. Davitt. On the night before the event Mrs. Davitt came to supper with him and there in the great restaurant's opalescent shadows beneath the cover of the music, Griscom made her a confession. It was just after the old lady, who could remember Sophia Valliant's glorious girlhood, had finished an anecdote of its greatness with a sigh, and had added that she was afraid these nervous attacks had been brought on by the first hot-spell of the spring atop of that too arduous production in which Sophia had never spared herself, that Griscom took what he felt was his life in his hands and confided that though he had never seen Miss Valliant act he had always doubted her genius.

He was humbly aware of the fatuity and futility of such a statement and he was prepared for the eloquent silence that followed it. He tried to explain and Mrs. Davitt listened to him with the thunderous calm of one who says, "God give me patience." He could end only by apologizing; now, at least, he said, like a hero of modern romance, he had travelled four thousand miles to see her.

Mrs. Davitt then said, "You wouldn't believe me, of course? No, very likely, I, as an old timer come under

the same difficulty. What! Oh, you've *seen* me act! For actors, that's it, of course—seeing is believing. The million men who have seen can't convince the one man *who came late.* Well, see her. She will convince you."

"But if she's ill—not in good form—I dread doing her an injustice—"

"She's not ill. The hotel people exaggerated that to the reporters because there were so many inquiries and cables from celebrities and school-children and millionaires and settlement-guides and foreign courts, it made them feel like the center of the civilized world. Sophy —you don't know her power."

The theatres were letting out and as the restaurant's flower-scented light began to gloat upon pale draperies and immaculate shirt-fronts that advanced among the tables, here and there Mrs. Davitt stopped a friend or two and acquainted them with Griscom's heresy. They all stared at him with a kind of polite alarm as if he had been an illustrious lunatic. He was glad when it was time to leave the restaurant. They stepped out into a street that was opposite Miss Valliant's theatre and that was jammed with the carriages and motors of her audience. "The Water-Lily" was so long a performance that it was barely over. There for the moment high above them the name of Sophia Valliant stamped the sky in letters of flame; then it went out.

At her own door, "You will see her," Mrs. Davitt repeated. "She will convince you. To-morrow evening then."

"To-morrow evening."

"It all depends on Miss Valliant, mamma."

"Certainly. If she wants you to get the part you'll get it; if not, you won't."

"She must know they've given it to someone else."

"Well, I intend to ask her what they mean by it, anyhow."

The figures of Lucille LeGrande and of her daughter Cecilia, Cecilia Rowan, Miss Valliant's understudy, were becoming almost painfully familiar on Broadway. Though they were thus branded together, it was the mother's onslaught for Cecilia, not Cecilia's for herself, which the managers dreaded. Cecilia, though two-and twenty, was in many ways a great baby; her slenderness drooped or swayed in the wind of her mother's vigor; she had a lazy roving eye and in the mocking drowsiness of her smile, its sensitive and exquisite friendliness was too shy for careless recognition; the loveliness of her face was never remarked or reckoned with, and afterwards people at large remembered that they had never seemed to catch her eye; it was as if they had always seen her veiled and this veil was in part thrown round her by the passionate absorption with which her mother hung over her, guarding her alike from shadow and from sunshine. In less words, Cecilia was something of a negligible quality. Not so Lucille LeGrande. That lady during her youth had played leading business with her first husband, a star whose popularity had been so great that at his death his fortune was found to have been entirely dissipated by his convivial relations with the world; his widow, nothing daunted, put forth in "La Belle Russe," "East Lynne" and "The Clemenceau Case." Occasionally funds became so low that it was necessary to save a salary by having Cecilia play

Little Willie, but it was such a point of pride with Miss Legrande to deny this that sometimes she denied it to Cecilia herself. When Cecilia was twelve the mother began to be anxious for the daughter's future and promptly lost all the money she had on a Broadway venture. Still undiscouraged she fell in love with Ned Carey—a widower with a little son—a man younger than herself, in whom she believed she had discovered a luminary fated to put out the light of Edwin Booth. They were married, but as they were both now completely poor she was never able to get his light from under its bushel. If he was a genius he was so only on one-night-stands, where nobody ever saw him and whence nobody ever heard of him. He was not very strong and he was very "intense"; and whether or not it was the combination that killed him, he died quite unnoticed somewhere between Manungachunk and Canaldover when Cecilia was nineteen. Miss LeGrande then put her stepson, Teddy, to live in Cincinnati with her elder daughter, a grass-widow with two babies, all largely dependent on Miss Legrande for their livelihood, and having thus comfortably arranged a somewhat heterogeneous family and having decided that Cecilia had been "buried long enough," took up that young lady in one hand, so to speak, and carried her to Broadway. For the fortunes of the rest of the family having thriven there so well, Cecilia was also upon the stage. "If once she can get her chance—!" the mother had said. That was three years ago, but the chance had not come yet; Miss LeGrande was still battling in her daughter's name at managerial doors. At first she had supposed that many a hand would be held out to Cecilia for her father's sake, but

that great popularity of handsome Jimmy Rowan had been swallowed in the quicksand of the years; Cecilia, as far as any claim from her stage ancestry and rearing were concerned, was but a disinherited child, the first "society" woman with a divorce case, the first show-girl with a letter of introduction stepped past her into her hereditary chance. And now the great creatures in their offices, dealing out fates and fortunes with Olympian nods, began to dread the advent of mother and daughter, the persistent appeal, the hackneyed reasonings they were so weary of; according to the good manners that the last few years have brought in, they did not always refuse to see the two women, but they were so tired of them that they would not have given Cecilia anything if they had had it; the precedent of refusing her had become legendary. Not indeed that employment had been wholly lacking during these years. Miss LeGrande had no longer money for starring, nor prestige for even a decent engagement, but they spent the winters in repertoire companies in one of which Cecilia played eleven parts—including an evil Russian countess and an Irish apple woman in the same piece—and dressed them all elaborately for twenty-five dollars a week; there were certain superior dog-days when by playing in stock twice a day with rehearsals every morning, Sundays included, they had escaped the horrors of a penniless summer in New York; there was even one affluent winter when Cecilia played the lead in "No Wedding Ring For Her." But every spring and fall and all the unoccupied time between was devoted to their hunt after the Chance. And the Chance not only continued unyielding both to the mother, strident and ag-

gressive for her girl, and to the listless girl herself, but became more remote than ever as they grew to be more and more marked at agencies and along the staring Rialto blocks, where they bore all the terrible paraphernalia of their kind—the plumed, elaborate heads, the durable smile, the careful excessive clothes, seldom quite fresh, seldom quite "smart." Miss Legrande had never been able wholly to break away from the standards of "La Belle Russe" and "Lady Isabelle"; on herself it is true she wasted neither cash nor time, but she spent herself on silks and beads and feathers for Cecilia. Cecilia, who guessed better, did not protest. She cast sheep's eyes at the long laces and the silvery furs in the shop windows, at the pale crêpes and the fresh lawns with their faintly flushed embroideries and yearned for them with a sickness of desire that no one dreamed of. Failing these, makeshifts were a matter of indifference to her. She continued to choose in the shop-windows—"If I had a good engagement—" and sometimes she had quite a sense of disappointment when her selections disappeared before she had bought them. But Cecilia was not particularly unhappy. She had adored her brilliant young stepfather, and he had made a world for her; she still lived in it, took her pleasure in it with every drop of cool water when she was thirsty, with every shimmer of colour that gladdened her patient eyes. The girl had an infinite capacity for joy, and Ned had known how to cultivate it. Then too, though she had been kept at school every winter while he was alive, in the summers he had taught her how to act. He had taught her Ophelia when she was thirteen. For months at a time in their little travelling stock her mother had given

up the leading parts to her; she had hosts of beautiful women, sisters of hers, closed in her heart, and she could feel their breath parting her lips, longing to speak as they had been spoken for by her under Ned's eyes, and these women were not only Viola and Juliet and Rosalind, those good, great ladies, but Carmen and Paula Tanqueray and the Lady with the Camelias. It may be inferred that this society would keep Cecilia not only entertained, but busy; in the material world, however, she was managed by her mother rather like the child of Stevenson's observation "towed forward sideways by the inexorable nurse"; it was rather hard on the nurse, who sometimes felt the languid child heart-breakingly heavy on her hands. For you must keep a sharp look-out on Broadway if you are going to see your Chance!

To-day, however, they were not on Broadway, but at home in their murky little furnished flat. Miss LeGrande alone was going out. The business to-day was extremely disagreeable and Miss LeGrande gathered all possible disagreeables, as did Arnold Winkelreid the *bayonets,* into her own breast; thus might Cecilia pass on unscathed to conquest. She was going after the Chance which had been quite near, but which now seemed about to evade them. Although Miss LeGrande had had but a brief engagement that winter, Cecilia was playing a little part, just a line or two, with the great Miss Valliant. Miss Valliant had given it to her after weeks of stalking and entreaties and in place of another part, still small but fairly conspicuous, with which she had closed Miss LeGrande's mouth by promising it to Cecilia for next season. Then she had given Cecilia

the understudy, and, when she had been ill, Cecilia had rehearsed till she was ready to drop, in the hope of letting the stage manager see what she could do, of proving herself worthy of next year's promotion. And then at noon to-day Miss LeGrande had read in The Reflector the name of a girl who was engaged for next season for that part! Miss Legrande was now going to urge Miss Valliant to keep her word and she was so anxious to look prosperously imposing and she was so shabby on account of Ned's boy's dentist's bill, that she had got out her old Clemenceau Case purple broadcloth cape, expensively embroidered in jet and brushed it up; a slight odour of gasoline, a slight glaze of service distinguished it. The errand was a nauseous one and Miss LeGrande quailed before it, and put on a little rouge; when it is considered that she pushed herself forward by the recollection that she was bearing up the rights and hopes of her young daughter, all the coming days of the children in Cincinnati, neither the Marcelle wave nor the picture hat borrowed from Cecilia nor the light gloves she had burst out of are wholly funny.

"If I 'm later than a quarter of five," she said to Cecilia, "you'll have to start the dinner. I'm sorry Malty won't be here to show you, but his rehearsal will keep him late. I don't know but it's better in a way, and don't keep asking him to go out for butter and dribdrabs at the last minute as you did yesterday, Cissie. The poor fellow's willing enough, but when he isn't any relation and when he can't pay a cent toward his food it doesn't seem quite delicate. You can make some fresh coffee and there's a little rice you can warm over. I

can't trust you to cook a potato. It isn't much, but we have got a good steak and he'll just have to make out with it. After she's seen me with 'em on I shan't care—I'll stop and put up my earrings on the way home and to-morrow we'll have chicken. Cecilia, you're letting your head hang again!" She gave Cecilia the minutest directions about the steak and about lighting the gas-range, but Cecilia never seemed able to grasp directions about concrete things. "Sometimes she looks quite thick-headed!" thought the poor mother. "Now you do your voice exercises while I'm gone," she said, "and don't forget—listen, Cissie—don't forget to hold your head up. Cecilia, listen to me!"

Cecilia supposed herself to be listening as hard as she could and she was going so far as to dramatize all the outward and visible signs of listening, but she was really wondering whether her mother would get her the part. She did not believe that Dave Engle or even his subordinate managers cared much about it, one way or the other. "It all depends on Miss Valliant," she told herself.

When Cecilia was alone, she went back into the little sitting-room and did her voice exercises conscientiously. But she was glad to be rid of them. She was surprisingly unstrung by this new anxiety, and when she tried to calm herself her nerves were ravelled without her knowing why, by the useful, workshop disorder of the room; books and plays, newspapers and sewing materials and trunks-in-eruption were everywhere. Everything suggested uncompleted effort. Miss LeGrande was cutting over her old black brocade and spangling the yoke of it for Cecilia. It was a little shiny even without

the spangles; Cecilia looked at it with her idle smile—"And the desert shall blossom like the rose," she said softly. It did not occur to her to clear anything up; they always lived in this surprising litter. "When I get a good engagement," she told herself, "I'm going to have lots and lots of room—" They had no room now, only a presentable address and a telephone for the agents, for the managers. Cecilia began to forget to hold her head up; she was not very strong and what hope she had was not active; her head did not hang exactly, but it swayed and drooped to one side like the head of a tired flower. She took up her book—Maeterlinck's "The Princess Maleine." Cecilia did not read so much for the literary as for the dramatic effect. She presented every scene to herself as she went along and mentally acted the characters that appealed to her, in clear detail and with a passion that wore out her vitality because it was smothered. But she was so intently nervous that she could not read consecutively; she tried a magazine, but she turned the pages without seeing anything. The suspense was dreadful.

On the girl's impressionable nature the mystic miseries of the doomed young princess had left a sense of haunting oppression; she had now no confidence in her mother's success, and failure in this instance seemed like the end of the world. Her mother had said that Cecilia could not stay with "The Water-Lily" on the road next season without the larger salary of the better part; she could not travel on the salary she was getting now. And Cecilia was in love with "The Water-Lily"; she was content to serve the play, however humbly, and the little worn volume in the original French, which she

had bought long before even Miss Valliant played the translation, she still handled with as devout a touch as that of any musician for his violin. But in all this devout humility she was extremely jealous, considering the play as at once her highest altar and her private property; she was jealous of other people's connection with it, of their chatter about it, and their opinions which they did not recognize her authority to mould; people, indeed, with the effrontery to pretend that they understood it as well as she did! Even for the performances of the great Sophia she cherished a sentiment like that of a slighted mistress—this other woman was superior in every way, but, Oh! she could not love so much! When Cecilia had finally got her little foothold in the production she had felt as if it were a crucial thing; to leave it and New York now without having accomplished anything, taken one step higher in her profession, seemed like a definite abandonment of hope, a final resignation to a life of what Malty called "back to the woods."

Cecilia shivered. She got up and began to drift restlessly about. At the dining-room window which looked into a court no bigger than an air-shaft she stopped and looked aimlessly down. In doing so she caught the eye of a lean black cat which came there every day to have dinner thrown to it; the cat immediately opened its mouth at her, devouringly, but without a sound, as if its impatience was beyond speech. Cecilia went into the kitchen, but she could find nothing except the cold rice; she did not think the cat would value that. She longed to cut a strip off the raw steak, but she was afraid that would look rather slighting to Malty. There

would be plenty after dinner and certainly the cat's arrival was premature. Its pantomime, however, was peremptory and Cecilia did not feel equal to reasoning with it. She decided to keep away from the window. She said to herself, "If I had a good engagement I'd pay that cat's board out at that nice veterinary's in the country, where Miss Fiskins boards Augustus, until I bought that place up the river for Gertie and the children, and then it could go to live with them." She had said this every day since the cat began to come. Cecilia, however physically frail, was extraordinarily tenacious in her ideas.

Just before she left the kitchen there was a crash overhead, where the Cass family was living rent free in the flat of an absent and philanthropic actress, and then came a child's windy howl. "Gladys has broken something again and her mother has slapped her," thought Cecilia. "Gladys seems to have all the troubles of a stage-child and a home-child combined." She did not altogether blame Mrs. Cass, the woman was young and poor and pretty, ignorant and quick-tempered and incompetent; her only idea seemed to be to dress up to please her husband. "But she isn't fit to take care of Gladys," said Cecilia to herself. Gladys was getting even fresher than most stage-children on account of this rasping home-life. Cecilia, forgetful of her own youth and Little Willie, thought with the queer pride of theatrical elders, that she and her mother and Gertie had always managed to keep the children off the stage. Oh, some way or another they must manage to send Teddy to college! When people asked Miss LeGrande if she meant him to go on the stage she always shook

her head ominously. "It killed his father!" Cecilia would have liked him to go on for that very reason and trample upon the heads of the profession, but she wanted him to go to college first. "When I get a good engagement"—she promised herself. A phonograph across the court twanged forth with "Oh, mother, mother, mother, pin a rose on me," and Cecilia fled from it to the sitting-room.

On her entrance a large photograph of Sophia Valliant fell to the ground. Cecilia picked it up and looked at it, grudgingly enchained by the extraordinarily arrestive, magnetic despotism of the face. She glanced from it to a copy of the same picture which formed the cover of the theatrical magazine she had been looking at. The latter version was all glare, the magnificent costume flaming in crude colours, but the face still compelled. Cecilia, who had long worshiped that expression, struggled to rebel. Was she a little tired of it? No, she could have watched Miss Valliant act forever, but perhaps she was a little tired of encountering her in catalogues and advertisements, standing for a silk-velvet or a hair tonic, in the great monthlies pouring out reminiscences, in the mouths of shop-girls and of foreign celebrities being interviewed. Yesterday's evening paper had blown to the floor along with the photograph; it was open at a cut of Miss Valliant and when Cecilia flounced it over it was only to encounter an anecdote of Miss Valliant's dog; in that fashion magazine by which Cecilia's mother was trying to remodel their wardrobe, Miss Valliant had an article giving advice to stage-aspirants. Cecilia started up and began to walk to and

fro—Oh! when would her mother come and tell her what Miss Valliant had decided? For here was the nip, the oppression which Cecilia was experiencing to-day, the source of her rebellion against her star, that the star held Cecilia's life in her hand. If a tiger was advancing upon you through the jungle it would be beautiful, wonderful, perfect, but your feeling would not be unresenting admiration. Will it strike, or will it pass? —that is all. Cecilia's soft hair clung to a forehead that was damp with unhealthy excitement. Only yesterday when she had read that review comparing with Miss Valliant to their disadvantage all the great actresses of the past, Cecilia had not contended against a single blast of praise, but now she felt as if she must set up some other champion, someone to keep Miss Valliant from usurping everything, or there would be no room for anyone else to stand, to breathe. Yet Miss Valliant was the only truly great person she had ever seen—except one, Ned Carey, Cecilia's stepfather! Yes, he and Miss Valliant, they alone were equals. "And to think I can't prove it!" said Cecilia. For she at least had seen him and knew, and though she stood between those two clear lights of genius with her own flame not yet burning, she did not hesitate to judge them equal and wholly great, the one old and heaped with honor, and the other without honor and young—and dead. Well, then, she was not between two lights after all, only a light and a darkness—Ned's flame had gone out with his breath. For where was the work, the monument, that he like other artists had left behind, his book or picture, statue or bridge or song? "I can't prove

him," Cecilia repeated, "no one can. Nothing can." And she turned spiritlessly to answer a sharp and spasmodic ring at the upstairs door.

On the threshold she found a small figure, lanky, in a soiled white dress that was too short for it; an enormous bow of washed-out blue ribbon straddled in the tow-coloured thinness of its hair. "Oh, Miss Rowan," it said in a tin-pipy wizened kind of voice, "can I come in and sit in your kitchen for a while and listen to the phonograph? It don't sound so plain upstairs."

Cecilia flung the door open and made her a great bow. "Enter Gladiola," she said, "the house is yours; the furnished flat is yours, O Lady Gladys." But she could not make Gladys play.

In the kitchen she supplied the guest with a chair and a glass of milk, and that young lady as she sat down spread her limp skirts with quite an air. Over the edge of the glass she said in the tone of polite conversation in the making, "Business keeps up something wonderful, don't it?"

"Yes, Gladys."

"I hear you're turning 'em away."

"So we are, Gladdy."

"Well, I wish I could play in a first-class show for once!"

Cecilia was endeavoring to sustain conversation at this altitude when the nasal ping of the phonograph droned forth into the Miserere. "That's a cute tune!" cried Gladys, her eyes brightening. Cecilia escaped and left her to its cuteness.

But the little sitting-room seemed to meet and close in upon her with a cage of fears and hopes. Cecilia

pacing that cage felt at last in her sweet blood the sting of that fierce fighting greed which had hardened her mother's face these many fugitive lean years. She must have that part, she must get on, she couldn't fall back! Cecilia knew how rapidly her youth was slipping through her fingers and that she was not able to seize one year of it for happy profit. And was it to be the same interminably, forever, with those coming after, whom she loved and whose road she ought to have made smooth? —Gertie's babies and Ned's boy and those years of her mother's life which that mother was straining to meet. She looked at the clock. Oh, her mother must be with Miss Valliant now, the great personage must be pronouncing judgment—Cecilia could have screamed. The charming, cool current of her whimsical spirit was turning hot and dry with rebellion, with desire. She scarcely knew what she answered when Gladys called to her, "How does Mr. Maltham like his job?" Nevertheless this turned her thoughts toward Malty. If only he would come in and talk to her! Dear Malty, dear old Malty! He was not yet thirty, but Cecilia always thought of him in this sober light. She considered him rather conventional, perhaps that was why. Last year when she was ill and her mother was out of town and Malty and two other boys had nursed her and cooked for her and kept house for her, that sweet Malty was such an old fuss that he had paid his own money to the janitress to come up and stay all night with them in the flat—now wasn't that ridiculous? Yet Cecilia, rather patronizingly, loved him for it. She hated his having work so far beneath him as this spring engagement in "The Diamond King"; he was such a good

actor, but he had been out of work all winter and was frightfully in debt. If Cecilia only had a good engagement where she could meet people of influence and introduce him a little—just one little push, with his appearance and ability, would make his way for him so easily! Cecilia was afraid that if he kept on in these howling melodramas he would lose in art, he would forget how to act, the spirit would go out of him. She knew that was what had happened to her mother who had been kept out of New York and dealing in cheap material until her method of handling that material had become one with it. Ned Carey had come too late for her, her true little flame had gone out. And suddenly that drooping head of Cecilia's lifted and stiffened like a snake's, she put her hand over her mouth. Gone out, extinguished, not the mere success, but the real thing, the actual acting fire!—was this what was to happen to her, too? She swung to the right about on her heel and made for human society in the kitchen.

"It don't generally work in the daytime," said Gladys, pricking an ear at the phonograph. Once more she spread her skirts. "I dressed up myself. Papa's loaded again and mamma's locked herself in the bedroom to spite him. Much he cares!" Cecilia was getting the steak out of the ice-box and the child looked at it. "I didn't have any lunch," she said; "mamma was to the dressmaker's then; psha! when I grow up, I'm not going to marry any piano-tuner like him. I'd sooner marry an actor, they're away most o' the time any way. I'd just as leaves stay to dinner."

"I meant to write you an invitation," said Cecilia, "but my pink paper's all gone. Let's just shake

hands on it." She took and pressed the dirty little paw.

"You're kind o' dumpy, to-day, ain't you?" inquired the guest, still holding the hand of her hostess and regarding her gravely. "I think you're terribly pretty. I don't know why managers don't think so. Or some fellar. If your little niece was on here, I'd be awful nice to her. I'd take her to all the shows. I take mamma now, she signs my name for passes. Your little niece ain't on the stage, is she?"

"No," said Cecilia, clutching at a noncommittal courtesy of tone.

Gladys looked at her sharply, "I don't see but what I'm just as well off on the stage as I am at home," she volunteered. "Say, did you know maybe my aunt was going to be wardrobe-woman with your company? Yes, the extras are so fresh with their costumes, this one can't manage 'um at all. You bet my aunt'll manage 'um, all right. When I'm acting with her I lay abed late and she brings me up my breakfast, an' I have to take naps an' walks and do lessons. Sometimes I kind o' like it. Sometimes when you're on one-night-stands an' there's just a woman to look after the children, and you know she don't give a cent for you, sometimes it's kind o' fierce. Say, I wish I could get that little boy's part in your company along with her an'—you."

"Oh, honey-bunch, I wish you could. Isn't Bessie going to stay?"

"Not next season. She's getting too big, she's got to go to school. I'm near nine myself, but I'm small for my age. I can play little boys a long while yet. When I grow up I'm going to play 'Zaza.' They say stage-

children never grow up to be anything, it's all squeezed out of them when they're little, but—here, let me show you." Cecilia had given a little nervous squeal at the puff of the gas-range and Gladys capably arose and lighted it for her.

"Gladdy," said Cecilia, when the steak was on the broiler, "when I get a good engagement I'm going to have a place in the country—I'm going to rent it right away, first, and then buy it and build and I'm going to have my brother and my sister and her children there to live, and I want you to come and spend a whole summer with them. Will you?"

"Yes," said Gladys with flat and alarming promptitude. "When you going to have it?"

"Oh—oh, I don't know! When I get a good engagement."

"Oh—say, before then, you couldn't say a word for me about that part to Mr. Engle, could you?"

"No, dear," said Cecilia sadly, "I never even see Mr. Engle, you know."

"No, I know. I told mamma so. But people that ain't in the business, you know, you can't make 'um understand. Do you like your steak rare?"

"Yes, but we have to have it well done for Mr. Maltham."

They set the table and Cecilia put on the water for the coffee and got the rice ready to warm. "You'd better turn that steak," said the guest.

As Cecilia obeyed her, the cat in the court-yard sent up a fervid summons. "*Oh, dear!*" said Cecilia, "I'm nervous enough about getting dinner, what shall I do about that cat!"

Gladys looked out of the window, "Couldn't you lower her some milk in a bottle?"

On a second appeal it was decided that Gladys should carry down the milk, bearding the janitress. Then it was discovered that Cecilia had given her the last drop and that she had drunk it. There was a guilty pause. Then Cecilia flew in the face of Providence and brought forth a half-bottle of cream. "I daren't take any off the steak," she said, "but I just will off the cream. He can't possibly notice that if I serve the rest in a pitcher. Here, you won't spill any out of this." She poured a part of the cream into a kind of silver cuspidore that was meant for a butter dish and engraved with the names of Junius Brutus Booth, Charlotte Cushman and so on—a souvenir of an Actor's Fund Fair. Gladys took it and departed. Cecilia measured out the coffee. Her mother, oh, her mother!—what news was she bringing?"

Presently Malty came. He looked very pale, but between the future and the cat Cecilia was too wrought up to notice it. He was scarcely seated before she began confiding in him. "I just can't stand it any longer. After dinner, when there's some steak, I'm going down and get it, and it's going to live right here. If I have to leave town before I can get money to pay its board, why, it'll just have to be chloroformed, that's all. If only mamma would get home and tell me, but that's always the way. I never know anything and she doesn't come, it's simply—Malty, what's the matter?"

"I've lost my job, that's all. Fired. I didn't have ginger enough for them." He dropped his head on his clinched fists and if he did not sob it was because he was really a dear fellow. Cecilia put her hand blindly

on his shoulder and gave him a little twitching shake. But she was powerless. And whatever would become of him now? She could not follow his secret bitterness, that he had just been going to touch the management for twenty-five and take the two ladies to supper at Rector's! They would never know that now—Malty was no braggart. He felt Cecilia stiffen with excitement at the sound of Miss LeGrande's key in the door.

Miss LeGrande came slowly and heavily into the room. Her face was dark with pain and she turned stony eyes upon her daughter. "Who did you think you were," said she, "that a star should keep her word to you?"

Cecilia opened her lips and closed them again without speaking. Malty asked, "What did she say?"

"Say! I didn't even see her. She'd gone motoring. Her secretary knew nothing about it. But who do you think this girl is that's announced to play the part? Miss Valliant's cousin!"

They said nothing more, there was nothing to say. The floor heaved a little under Cecilia's eyes and then settled again to the deadly flatness of every day. Light as is the step with which hope leaves us, it shakes our house to its foundations. And Cecilia felt that it was time to acknowledge a fact; there wasn't room enough, Miss Valliant filled all space, the world was hers and it was filled by her and hers completely.

Gladys rang and Malty let her in. "I waited for the saucer—" said the guest. "Gee, your steak's burnt!"

Miss LeGrande cast one glance at Cecilia and fled for the kitchen. The worst was true. Now indeed might Cecilia hang her head. The steak was no longer even a burned steak, the fierce fire to which Cecilia had ex-

posed it, had annihilated it. No one reproached her, but it was the last straw, the unbearable. She covered her shamed face and wept. Even Malty was too crushed to comfort her. Her mother made the coffee and they sat down to that and the warmed rice in silence. It was time to light the gas, but no one lighted it. Miss LeGrande's face did not relax. Cecilia continued to drip tears into her plate; she lifted her rice bravely to her mouth but she could not swallow it. The phonograph, a chronic bromide, contributed, "There was I a waiting at the Church." Again the cheated and certainly exacting cat lifted up its voice and in that sound Cecilia heard the lament of all the creatures whom she had failed, whom she had disappointed, whom she had presumed to think of helping and whom she had robbed of food. The voice of her own life was not lacking in the cry. The janitress rang the telephone and called up a complaint of Gladys, but the second time Malty answered it he said, "It's somebody for you, Cis."

Cecilia took up the receiver and sniffled into the phone. "Hello, yes," they heard her say; "yes, it is. Well. Yes. I understand. Certainly. All right." She hung up the receiver and turned round upon them, dead-white in the glooming dusk; her teeth knocked against each other as she paused, but the trained voice did not shake. "Miss Valliant's got another attack," she told them. "I've got to play the part to-night."

Long afterwards Griscom remembered the horrible sick surge of disappointment, thrilled, nevertheless, by that strange sense of fate, with which he heard the stage-manager's announcement. But longer afterwards

still there was something he would remember a thousandfold, and that was the moment when there came forward before Sophia Valliant's audience, the woman in her place: a woman as tall as she, slender like her, but how much younger and of a how much more innocent and tender beauty! She lifted a voice remote and cool, she stood—with slightly drooping head—among the pale lights and greeneries of the scenic woodland like—like a water-lily, Griscom thought, where Sophia Valliant's vitality must have burned like a sun-flower. She wore Miss Valliant's famous gown, straight and soft from the shoulders, but massy like flexible armour, with green embroideries and clustered jewels. About her breast and neck her hair lay thick and was all caught with pearls and trembling emeralds, and as she moved, these and the palely gleaming pendants of her gown clashed in a faint clear noise like the tinkle of dropping water. The audience, happily startled, leaned forward to make sure who this might be. Thus did Cecilia come into her own.

It was the night when that famous Frenchman, the author, was in front. After the third act while the great management hustled about getting out statements for the newspapers in which it knocked a couple of years off Cecilia's age and referred picturesquely, but with the most dramatic delicate restraint to the obscurity from which Cinderella sprang, the audience demanded the author and then again they demanded someone else. Whereupon the author, in a generously smiling pomp, led out Cecilia, tremulous, but flower-sweet and proud and startled like a deer. The house rose at her, a great adoring wave that longed to hold and realize her, to catch her

down into itself. Cecilia swayed like a reed to the breath of that tumult. It broke upon her in a rain of blossoms, the women in the boxes cast her those they carried, those they wore, the men who had bought out the neighboring florists since they saw her, flung her great odorous sheaves. There was no veil about Cecilia now, she shown there all light and bloom, with a thousand gleams and airy shadows breaking and blending about her brows; knee-deep in a foam of flowers, she came at last face to face with the world and they regarded each other with a magnificent friendliness.—Droop your head now if you will, O Cecilia, and there shall be none to say you nay; they will photograph that droop as the crown of art, grand ladies shall try to imitate it! Spill, if you like, out of the chalice of your potent little hands, wealth and ease for your household with green fields for its children—yes, and for the piano-tuner's child—help and recognition for your poor friends who are artists, cream and catnip and planked shad if necessary for the lean cat in the courtyard, blessings and refreshment out of a golden horn! Give and enjoy, you have a right to, for there is plenty; it is a strange word to you, but it speaks true—there is plenty—plenty! And do you, at last, unrivalled, unquestioned, as one having authority, hold commune with and interpret your own "Water-Lily," the lady of your heart!

An usher brought the note of a spectacularly-minded friend to Mrs. Davitt's box. She read it and leaning to Griscom touched his arm. "Sophia Valliant is dead!" she said. "What? How did you hear? How sad!" His eyes were shining and his throat was dry, for he could be an enthusiast, and he glanced back

eagerly to the stage. Mrs. Davitt addressed him no more. She looked at the crazy audience that had been Sophia Valliant's; it was greedy for Cecilia and for Cecilia only, and her old face settled into harsh lines. When the performance was over they stood waiting for their cab where the name of Sophia Valliant lighted that night for the last time still blazed a little moment above their heads. "That girl!" said the old woman half aloud. "A sweet girl! A most lovely actress! So young—I wonder who taught her? But Sophia Valliant was a genius. She was as far above this child as the sky is."

Griscom heard her and turned on her with a hard little flash. "Prove it!" said the critic.

THE PROFESSIONALS

"Still may I look with heart unshook
On blow brought home or missed
Still may I hear with equal ear
The clarion down the list,
Still set my lance above mischance
And ride the barriere:
Or hit or miss, how little 'tis —!"

THE PROFESSIONALS

IT was a Saturday at Alderson's. The great pleasure gardens in those long days of summer seemed like the playground of the whole west; the holiday crowds were pouring there now, out from the vigorous city whose youth is never tamed by summer heat, by the months that are only fresh and golden in that high country. To reach Alderson's the trolleys shot for more than three miles over the brilliant meadows, crossed the shallow, shining river and brought up with something of a grand-stand bump almost on the mountain's slope. A man toiling in their wake looked after them wistfully; then he stared out over the fields upon fields of wild white poppies that danced in their dreams, nodding to the breeze and shimmering to the sun. Here and there was the gold of the dwarf sunflower; here and there the blue of that great headed blossom which later would cover the land with royal glory. There was not much woodland, but the birds, that were everywhere, made what they could of the low copses and the cottonwoods, and the whole morning rocked with their melody; this would be followed by solemn happy silences broken in their turn by flitting trolleys with their calling, laughing burdens. A hundred sun-steeped odours of growth, of fertility, of an abundance giving itself lightly to the wilderness, streamed mingling together in the fresh, warm air. The man had come out from the rich mar-

kets of the town, he had passed vegetable gardens where the thick, mammoth leaves seemed ready to burst with their own fulness; the bloom had fallen from the surrounding orchards but their fruit waxed heavier with every noon and before him, as he knew, the gardens of the pleasure-seekers were one sweet bewilderment of flowers. In that wholesome and romantic air there was something indescribably vigorous and pure and fortunate, like a good wind. For this was the very land of milk and honey, of plenty and youth and gold—even the dust was gold, warm too, and fragrant and clean like the full summer, and where it dispersed lightly about the man's old shoes and rested on his worn cheap clothes and stained and colored the grim pallour of his face, it was like a shining, fairy essence, as if the spicy, winey air of that keen climate springing so sharp at every dawn and warmed through by how many thousand suns had been dried into some quintescent philtre of itself. This lively powder, this bright dust was like the very grain of that country where everything is at once careless and precious and everything gives life. The man was not a countryman and he was tired, for he had walked toward Alderson's through the whole night, and he knew it to be well for him that it was no eastern road he followed, and no eastern air that his spirit seemed to lean upon unshielded under that ardent sky. Yet he sighed. Where he could he followed the car track. Now and then a spot of shade or the frollicking silver and plash of an irrigation ditch invited him to rest, but he kept on with a kind of dogged hope like a man who has staked everything on the end of his road.

In the meanwhile the crowds were thickening about the gates of Alderson's. The proprietors of the gardens, fearing the effect upon the populace of the summer theatre's abrupt closing during the illness of the stock-star, had done all that was possible in the way of out-door attractions, and in these gay hordes they beheld their reward. The multitude, however, showed a disposition to settle also upon Poley's, the little restaurant, vaguely foreign, across the road. Whenever the leader of a party discovered that the man who took tickets at Alderson's was too busy to answer a certain question he went over to the open-fronted, table-strewn space at Poley's, which two or three steps might have dignified into a verandah, and asked his question there over a drink—a soft drink if he stayed with the families in the open, or the real thing if he stepped into the little planked back-room behind the simple light blue curtain which did duty for a license. In either case the question was always the same. "You think Frank Brainerd's going to appear out here this morning?" To this would come the cautious reply, "He's advertised to."

Frank Brainerd—unlike that other man down the road whose heart was also set on Alderson's—was something of a local celebrity and this question was frequently developed by bystanders. "His partner, Miller, has just got down here to meet him." "Did he say he would perform?" "Oh, at the hospital they said it 'ud be another month before he got out." "They've sent a carriage for him from Alderson's just the same." "Oh, he'll make a little fortune if he's here to show off

those snakes—and that thing—to-day. He'll be here all right." "Yes, but if he lost his life by it," said a woman, "or they had to cut his arm off—"

From these scattered commentators there emerged a particularly bumptious lady, at once incredulous and greedy, pitting herself against the uncommunicative Poley, Jr. "Aw now, do you mean to tell me he was ever really bit by any Gila Monster?"

"That's what he was," Joe Poley so far forgot himself as to proclaim.

"I never. And did he really break out in purple spots size of a silver dollar, the way they say he did?"

"That's what they say," relapsing into his normal caution.

"An' did they have to pour a whole quart of whiskey down him—really?"

"So they say."

The eyes of several listeners brightened enviously and the domestic, vine-shadowed cigar-stand of Mr. Poley, its pop-corn balls and ginger beer, began to glitter with a borrowed and a lurid glory.

The lady's stout person quivered with excitement. "An' do you mean to tell me he's alive to-day and coming out here to handle that thing again and his hand cut off already an' him the only man that was ever bit by one an' didn't die in six months slowly paralysed?"

"He's advertised to."

"It ain't six months yet," volunteered a hopeful spirit.

"I've heard say the thing itself was took sick," a wit drawled.

Joe Poley, disdaining to deny or affirm, frothed a

lemonade in his shaker and jogged up the small boy who had ordered it but whose attention had been lured away by this talk of the fabulous Brainerd.

A gentleman of more social pretensions peering hopelessly among the nickel cigars, asked: "This Brainerd the man that runs the snake-show?"

"Yes, him and Miller. Miller's new at the business, though, and he ain't never been bit by anything beyond a rattler. Brainerd's the fellow they all want to see."

The gentleman, appeased by a cigarette from some hidden hoard, listened with a faint smile to the outcries of the stout lady—"But that's his only chance, isn't it? that it made itself sick. If it was to die, wouldn't that be a sign he's going to get well? You may think you're funny, but it said so in the papers! He's got such a lot o' old snake bite poison in him that they kind o' hope it'll be stronger than the Gila Monster's, an' if it dies, that's a sign that's so. Ain't I right?" she appealed to Joe Poley who replied, "That's what they say."

"It won't die, I imagine," smiled the gentleman.

"Get out!" shot forth the small boy over the straws of his lemonade; "a copperhead bit him the week before, 'cause I saw it, an' it died!" Everybody looked with chilliness at the small boy as if he had no right of speech in so informed and august an assemblage.

The eye of the gentleman, travelling over the heads of the little picnicky groups, rested upon a round table occupying a corner at once the most airy and the most sheltered; about this, two young men and a girl, dressed with a certain sophistication in riding clothes, sat at their refreshments in light-hearted ease. Upon his reaching and saluting them, the gentleman was at once

asked to sit down and have something; but he was too superior to the sunny, rowdy spirit of the day for that, and he said no. he had promised to meet some friends at the Casino inside the gardens and he supposed he would have to go and look them up.

"At the Casino? Oh, then," said the apparent host, who was the very handsomest of the young fellows, "you will see Clara Louise in all her glory!"

"Clara Louise?"

"Yes, Miss Folsom, our heavy woman. Some of the prominent citizens are giving her a luncheon. Positively for this day only her foot is on her native heath and she has returned to doing the society act."

"She was *never* a society woman!" indignantly ejaculated the gentleman. And "Oh, I daresay not," the other easily replied.

The second young man added, with a quaint twist of his mouth: "There must be lots of divorcees, when you come to think of it, who really aren't society women." The handsome young man stirred uneasily and looked at the speaker with reproach; he was not sure that divorcee was a proper term to use before little Miss Waters. This was Miss Waters' first season on the stage, and you couldn't be too careful of her.

"Who's giving the luncheon?" asked the gentleman.

"Oh, well, if you come down to that, I daresay they aren't society people either. There is something suggestively characteristic in their name of Packer in which, probably, they don't rejoice. But I should be disturbed to hear they weren't very rich."

"The Packers!" exclaimed the gentleman in disdain, "The T. B. Packers! Oh, they're rich enough but—

why should you distress yourself about such people?"

"Because a friend of mine, an actor, Dan Herron—you may have heard of him? well, that doesn't matter—is engaged to marry Miss Packer. Must be married to her, come to think of it, by this time."

The gentleman with the cigarette was not interested. "What news of your star?" said he.

"Oh, Wentworth's better. We shall be playing again before long. It's been an awful nuisance to her, poor little woman, just as she was getting to be such a favorite out here."

"And she has the theatre on her hands, I understand, for the whole summer? It must be a terrible expense."

"Her darkest symptom," said Donnelly, "is that she's paying us our money while she's ill. I don't believe a woman can expect to get well in this world who does a thing like that."

"I understand it's a frightfully expensive cast."

"Oh, surely! These all star-stocks that really do contain one or two members who have failed in that capacity can't be got for nothing even in summer. But 'tis she that's the old-timer! She was so brought up in the business that she prefers actors to scenery, and we haven't had an electric fountain nor a real elephant the whole season. Only, she was taken ill as Lady Babbie and she means to return as Fedora, and her company are kept limber by the exercise."

"You must be glad of the rest."

Donnelly, Miss Waters and the handsome Torrance all looked vague and serious, and said Oh yes, they were.

The gentleman asked them if they were waiting for

the concert and Torrance answered No, that they were supposed to be resting their horses. Some of the others who had gone for over Sunday to Silverton were to join them on the mountain that afternoon; they themselves were due at the Whip and Saddle Club for dinner; there was a moon expected to ride back by, in time for the tail end of the evening concert. However, what they were really waiting there for, Torrance concluded, was a sight of Frank Brainerd.

The gentleman lifted his eyebrows. Did they really believe the man had been bitten by a Gila Monster, or that if he had, he would really come back there to-day and handle the thing again for exhibition!

"That's what they say," Torrance quoted after him in a jeering cheerfulness as he moved away, protesting.

The actors were left to themselves and the shining hurly-burly of the day. Before them, across the sorrel-coloured road and through the rustic gates, the crowd still poured and mingled in its motley joy. Starched and frilled families, pink and blue, with lunch baskets and flower-wreathed hats—the mothers in plaid silks or straining shirt waists—scrambled from the flag-decked trolleys and made for Poley's or into the gardens for the picnic grove; automobiles swept hissing up in green or scarlet pomp and deposited the floating elegance of veiled ladies, whose pale laces shimmered mystically under their light, long cloaks; these were escorted towards the Casino, presently to occupy seats at the concert; ordinary foot-passengers in crisp duck and limp lawns, in frock-coats and flannels, moved like royalty amid the haze of golden dust; the national banner streamed from the park gates above their heads,

airy little winds scattered the soft snow of the cotton-woods and the distant strains of the brass-bands; out from the gardens the perfume of heliotrope and verbena, of mignonette and roses came like a greeting and a promise; everywhere there was movement and chatter, laughter and colour, youth, frolic, life. All things lifted up their hearts to the sun.

"I'm sure Miss Wentworth must be all right soon," said little Miss Waters, suddenly. "I don't see how anybody can be sick here."

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"Europe!" Torrance mused, "that looks queer, too. He hasn't been out here long enough to risk Europe yet. I wonder if it can be off?"

"Off! No, you bet he wouldn't let it be. He couldn't

afford to. What a chance for Herron, after all he'd been through—to sit and face consumption in New York—yes, and most of the time since he's been sick without a job in a hall bedroom—and now to pick up millions and his health, too, in a place of glory like this. But I pity the girl."

"Oh, come now! I don't know—"

"Well, I do know. When Herron isn't way down on the earth earthy, he's all up in the air. He's either a freak or a genius, and I wouldn't like to have the job of keeping him amused for life."

"Well, Miss Folsom's never seen him," their companion insisted, "and she thinks Miss Packer's terribly unhappy. Didn't you think, when they got out of their motor, a while ago, and went into the gardens, that Miss Packer looked awfully, awfully pretty but a little too—"

"Isn't that Brainerd's partner?" Donnelly bluntly interrupted her.

Torrance looked up and hailed the partner. "Oh, Miller! Sit down. Have something. Any news of Brainerd?"

"I expect him every minute. If anything should happen to keep him, I don't know how I'm going to handle this crowd." He acknowledged Miss Waters' presence and gloomily accepted some sarsaparilla. "Nobody believes he'll be here; and then if he is here, they'll believe it never bit him. I wish it would die. It's twice as nasty looking lately; it's so sick. I wouldn't handle it for a farm. I've spoken to him about it, times enough, but pshaw, you couldn't keep him from mauling it when there's a show on, not if he was dying. It'll

kill him yet—you can tie to that all right." Uttering these doleful sentiments Mr. Miller took a swallow of ochre-coloured refreshment and cast a jaundiced eye upon the crowd. "Not that they care!" he added with the full effect of a banshee's curse. Himself a brave man, his devotion to Brainerd, his pride in him, were casting a gloom upon his point of view. He regarded ruefully the clipped end of his own thumb. "That was just a rattler," he explained. "Rattlers are enough for me."

As he spoke there was a little quickening change and motion in the crowd. A trolley flung itself forward and back for an instant with a vibrating jerk, and all eyes were fastened on a spare, broad-shouldered man who stood on the back platform and whose keen eyes smiled out at the public above the sling that bound his arm. Miller sprang to his feet. "There's Frank now!" and with a hasty motion of leave-taking started toward his friend. The faces of the actors brightened. They, too, rose. A simultaneous motion to desert little Miss Waters was heroically checked. But Miss Waters was a noble creature and urged them on; together they made their way with adroit pushes through the crowd—and then Brainerd's unhurt left hand met Torrance's grasp. "For the love of the Lord, Brainerd," said Torrance, "you're not going to do any such durn fool thing as to monkey with that beast again to-day!"

"Oh, I've got to, I guess. There's no danger at all. How are you?" nodded the hero of the day here and there over Torrance's shoulder. "You can bring the lady up to the tent all right, if she'd like to see

the show; there won't anything happen, of course. After a little everybody'll be in at the concert and I can show her round."

Suitable acknowledgments and excuses were made. It began to be clear that Miller was anxious to get his partner away, half because he dreaded for him the fatigue, the press, the prolonged handshaking under the hot noon, and half in the necessity of catching for the snake show the stragglers before the concert. As Brainerd let his attention wander between public acclamation and the exordiums of his partner, the keenness of his roving glance lighted for a moment upon a smallish thin man, very shabby, dark as night and covered with dust, who came with a kind of weary energy up to the gates of Alderson's and stood reading the old casts and posters with a strange greed in his eye. The strain of his long tramp back there after the trolleys showed in the heavy droop and drag of his still hopeful step; he stood within six feet of the blithe trio of actors, a somber contrast to their radiant ease, but without noting them or catching their notice. It was Brainerd who observed that the man had a kind of mark about him such as he himself still bore, for despite an essential vigor in his fatigue he was more gaunt than was quite seemly and there was a depth of pallor under his tan—"Bet he's not long out of a hospital," thought the snake tamer. There was something else, too; Brainerd thought the man looked hungry. Yet, lifting his eyes from the posters, he paid his dime for entrance-fee and went through the gates.

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rance say, "I suppose it's no use, old man, to argue about this Gila Monster business?"

"Oh, I guess not," said Brainerd again. He yielded to Miller's solicitations and started for the gardens.

"Well, you deserve all you get," Torrance called after him in fond admiration.

"Oh, well—business, you know."

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those snakes—and that thing—to-day. He'll be here all right." "Yes, but if he lost his life by it," said a woman, "or they had to cut his arm off—"

From these scattered commentators there emerged a particularly bumptious lady, at once incredulous and greedy, pitting herself against the uncommunicative Poley, Jr. "Aw now, do you mean to tell me he was ever really bit by any Gila Monster?"

"That's what he was," Joe Poley so far forgot himself as to proclaim.

"I never. And did he really break out in purple spots size of a silver dollar, the way they say he did?"

"That's what they say," relapsing into his normal caution.

"An' did they have to pour a whole quart of whiskey down him—really?"

"So they say."

The eyes of several listeners brightened enviously and the domestic, vine-shadowed cigar-stand of Mr. Poley, its pop-corn balls and ginger beer, began to glitter with a borrowed and a lurid glory.

The lady's stout person quivered with excitement. "An' do you mean to tell me he's alive to-day and coming out here to handle that thing again and his hand cut off already an' him the only man that was ever bit by one an' didn't die in six months slowly paralysed?"

"He's advertised to."

"It ain't six months yet," volunteered a hopeful spirit.

"I've heard say the thing itself was took sick," a wit drawled.

Joe Poley, disdaining to deny or affirm, frothed a

lemonade in his shaker and jogged up the small boy who had ordered it but whose attention had been lured away by this talk of the fabulous Brainerd.

A gentleman of more social pretensions peering hopelessly among the nickel cigars, asked: "This Brainerd the man that runs the snake-show?"

"Yes, him and Miller. Miller's new at the business, though, and he ain't never been bit by anything beyond a rattler. Brainerd's the fellow they all want to see."

The gentleman, appeased by a cigarette from some hidden hoard, listened with a faint smile to the outcries of the stout lady—"But that's his only chance, isn't it? that it made itself sick. If it was to die, wouldn't that be a sign he's going to get well? You may think you're funny, but it said so in the papers! He's got such a lot o' old snake bite poison in him that they kind o' hope it'll be stronger than the Gila Monster's, an' if it dies, that's a sign that's so. Ain't I right?" she appealed to Joe Poley who replied, "That's what they say."

"It won't die, I imagine," smiled the gentleman.

"Get out!" shot forth the small boy over the straws of his lemonade; "a copperhead bit him the week before, 'cause I saw it, an' it died!" Everybody looked with chilliness at the small boy as if he had no right of speech in so informed and august an assemblage.

The eye of the gentleman, travelling over the heads of the little picnicky groups, rested upon a round table occupying a corner at once the most airy and the most sheltered; about this, two young men and a girl, dressed with a certain sophistication in riding clothes, sat at their refreshments in light-hearted ease. Upon his reaching and saluting them, the gentleman was at once

asked to sit down and have something; but he was too superior to the sunny, rowdy spirit of the day for that, and he said no, he had promised to meet some friends at the Casino inside the gardens and he supposed he would have to go and look them up.

"At the Casino? Oh, then," said the apparent host, who was the very handsomest of the young fellows, "you will see Clara Louise in all her glory!"

"Clara Louise?"

"Yes, Miss Folsom, our heavy woman. Some of the prominent citizens are giving her a luncheon. Positively for this day only her foot is on her native heath and she has returned to doing the society act."

"She was *never* a society woman!" indignantly ejaculated the gentleman. And "Oh, I daresay not," the other easily replied.

The second young man added, with a quaint twist of his mouth: "There must be lots of divorcees, when you come to think of it, who really aren't society women." The handsome young man stirred uneasily and looked at the speaker with reproach; he was not sure that divorcee was a proper term to use before little Miss Waters. This was Miss Waters' first season on the stage, and you couldn't be too careful of her.

"Who's giving the luncheon?" asked the gentleman.

"Oh, well, if you come down to that, I daresay they aren't society people either. There is something suggestively characteristic in their name of Packer in which, probably, they don't rejoice. But I should be disturbed to hear they weren't very rich."

"The Packers!" exclaimed the gentleman in disdain, "The T. B. Packers! Oh, they're rich enough but—

why should you distress yourself about such people?"

"Because a friend of mine, an actor, Dan Herron—you may have heard of him? well, that doesn't matter—is engaged to marry Miss Packer. Must be married to her, come to think of it, by this time."

The gentleman with the cigarette was not interested. "What news of your star?" said he.

"Oh, Wentworth's better. We shall be playing again before long. It's been an awful nuisance to her, poor little woman, just as she was getting to be such a favorite out here."

"And she has the theatre on her hands, I understand, for the whole summer? It must be a terrible expense."

"Her darkest symptom," said Donnelly, "is that she's paying us our money while she's ill. I don't believe a woman can expect to get well in this world who does a thing like that."

"I understand it's a frightfully expensive cast."

"Oh, surely! These all star-stocks that really do contain one or two members who have failed in that capacity can't be got for nothing even in summer. But 'tis she that's the old-timer! She was so brought up in the business that she prefers actors to scenery, and we haven't had an electric fountain nor a real elephant the whole season. Only, she was taken ill as Lady Babbie and she means to return as Fedora, and her company are kept limber by the exercise."

"You must be glad of the rest."

Donnelly, Miss Waters and the handsome Torrance all looked vague and serious, and said Oh yes, they were.

The gentleman asked them if they were waiting for

the concert and Torrance answered No, that they were supposed to be resting their horses. Some of the others who had gone for over Sunday to Silverton were to join them on the mountain that afternoon; they themselves were due at the Whip and Saddle Club for dinner; there was a moon expected to ride back by, in time for the tail end of the evening concert. However, what they were really waiting there for, Torrance concluded, was a sight of Frank Brainerd.

The gentleman lifted his eyebrows. Did they really believe the man had been bitten by a Gila Monster, or that if he had, he would really come back there to-day and handle the thing again for exhibition!

"That's what they say," Torrance quoted after him in a jeering cheerfulness as he moved away, protesting.

The actors were left to themselves and the shining hurly-burly of the day. Before them, across the sorrel-coloured road and through the rustic gates, the crowd still poured and mingled in its motley joy. Starched and frilled families, pink and blue, with lunch baskets and flower-wreathed hats—the mothers in plaid silks or straining shirt waists—scrambled from the flag-decked trolleys and made for Poley's or into the gardens for the picnic grove; automobiles swept hissing up in green or scarlet pomp and deposited the floating elegance of veiled ladies, whose pale laces shimmered mystically under their light, long cloaks; these were escorted towards the Casino, presently to occupy seats at the concert; ordinary foot-passengers in crisp duck and limp lawns, in frock-coats and flannels, moved like royalty amid the haze of golden dust; the national banner streamed from the park gates above their heads,

airy little winds scattered the soft snow of the cotton-woods and the distant strains of the brass-bands; out from the gardens the perfume of heliotrope and verbena, of mignonette and roses came like a greeting and a promise; everywhere there was movement and chatter, laughter and colour, youth, frolic, life. All things lifted up their hearts to the sun.

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this was an opening in a high fence which let at once into a yard of beaten earth across which one saw the stage door. In the middle of the yard some men were gilding an old throne; on the velvet of its discarded cushions a kitten lay asleep. Through the open door the vast empty stage lay bare in the draggly light, and from the carpenter's shop at the rear came the pounding and banging and sawing that are generally reserved to interrupt rehearsals—and the sound of them came to that man's ears like the song of the grace of God. He was for the moment content simply to stand there and take in all that was alien to that happy land: the dust, the glue, the faint, floating, watery light, the hurried noise, the folded scenery canvas-side out, the prompt-table shoved to one side with some torn scrolls of music lying on it, the vast, void, ugly business-like interior, ready as an empty shop—in that fresh light, in that rich air, that noon, that garden, it was with these he warmed his heart and made peace with his soul.

Presently he turned to a stage-hand and said, with his voice lingering voluptuously on the words, "The performance at two?"

"Concert's at two-thirty," said the stage-hand, who had been eyeing him with a lenient curiosity, "Ain't any performance."

"No performance!" said the man.

"Nup."

"No matinée on Saturday?"

"No, no show at all, matinée nor night."

"Kate Wentworth's company's playing here, isn't it?" insisted the man with a kind of frightened stubbornness. He made his voice very commanding as

though he could snub fate into submission by snubbing the stage-hand.

"It *was* playing here; she's been sick and the theatre closed over two weeks ago."

The stranger stood staring at the stage-hand, and when the latter moved away he continued to stare at the same place as if he were not aware of any change, but bye-and-bye he looked at the ground a few feet in front of him instead; then without another question, another word, but with a lagging and crumpled gait, he went out of the yard. On the outside of the fence he stood about blindly for a little and then, aimlessly, he dropped onto a big boulder that stood on the edge of the path, pulling his hat over his eyes.

In the meantime Brainerd and his partner had reached the snake-tent. It had been a longish walk, stopped as it was at every step or two by good wishes and congratulations, and as this was Brainerd's first day out of hospital it had tired him. But being followed into the tent by a whole tillful of dime-giving visitors and being eagerly received by a number already there, he climbed at once over the wire barrier of "the den" which was fenced off in the center of the tent and picked up a copperhead. The bright-coloured, pretty little deadly thing coiled about his wrist and cuddled beneath his cuff; he slipped it gently out again, explaining its qualities to the fascinated interest of his audience; he followed this up with the more apparent evil of a cotton-mouthed moccasin; here and there he loaned a non-poisonous snake—a "king" or a "garter"—to some greedily heroic child whose parents were then filled with the same immediate consternation as the reptile; he took up

in pure idleness the biggest of the bull snakes, sick and savage and stone-blind in its scaling time, and scuffed some of its dead skin for it while he talked; he showed them the skin of the python's splendid mate who had died slowly of the cold under the flame of an August sun; he made the coach-whips lash up with their braided bodies the sand of the floor. Loose and at their ease in the den the serpents were better tempered than when kept in cages, still "Don't they fight each other?" people were continually asking Brainerd, and "Not in captivity," he would patiently reply; the doomed and comfortable white rats, mistaking their foes for dirt, pushed them about or prodded and dug in their sides with impunity. But in one corner some humourous spirits had driven the rattlers to fury by flicking handkerchiefs against the guarding screen; this was now covered with the fine purple film of venom which the snakes spat against it as they writhed and hissed, crouched and sprang in madness. Reproving these jesters somewhat tartly, Brainerd trod carefully among soft little supine bodies till he reached the group of rattlers, which he lifted in a twisted, wriggling bunch. One was spitting and fuming above the rest; the others he let slide carefully down his leg to the ground; that one he kept in the hollow of his hand, of his bent arm, where at once it lay quiet and at peace. There was a moment's silence in the tent.

But the crowd, however thrilled and edified by this entertainment, was still restively curious and expectant; even the children were not contented by the rabbits that munched in corners nor by Brainerd's pet eagle, not yet full-grown, which flirted with them from its perch,

winking its golden eyes; the public was afraid of being cheated, could not believe that it would not be, and Brainerd presently called out, "Well, where is he, Miller? I don't see our little friend—this one," he added sardonically, good-humouredly, touching his empty sleeve. The crowd rustled like the snakes themselves and drew as eagerly together.

"It's over there," said Miller, grudgingly, indicating with his thumb a distant cage.

"Psha!" said Brainerd. "Kept him caged up!"

He clambered out of the den and opening the cage door drew out the small and horrid squat figure of the Gila Monster.

The eyes of the crowd snapped with gratified expectancy at the same time that its bodies shrank and shuddered. "You been sick, hunh?" said Brainerd to the thing. He carried it to the edge of the den, and Miller brought him a small wooden table on which to exhibit it. He was running his fingers along the creature's puffy, bloated belly which seemed to press gratefully against them. "You haven't warmed his milk lately," he said to Miller in an undertone. "I wish it had died!" Miller growled. Brainerd continued rubbing it for a moment with a soft but rather absent-minded touch; then he set it down on the table and gave his brief lecture on its natural history. It looked, squatting there, like nothing more nor less than a large bead purse woven in a grotesque pattern of pink and black, and yet there was something in its chunky clownishness that excited instinctive loathing as if it were some horror of Egyptian fancy, some ancient and outraging caricature of innocence. It was so still and so bestial, so

mild, so mighty and so inert, sluggishly breathing death out of its open stupid mouth! Brainerd's accustomed hand moved it, lifted it, turned it over, set it down. The crowd was warned not to touch it, but the warning was unnecessary; people even begged Brainerd to desist —the public had seen what it wished to see and was satisfied and lifted its thumb. The python was then displayed, twined round Brainerd's legs and waist and heaped over his shoulders in the orthodox poster fashion. but even this was an anticlimax and the show was over.

The partners were content to be alone. In the interval before the next audience Brainerd lighted his pipe and stretched himself on a bench. "It's good to get back," he said to Miller, and he repeated this to himself after Miller had gone to the Refreshment Pavilion for his lunch. He was quite willing that no one should come along for a while; he was glad to lie there in the warm yellowness of the tent under the sun and feel himself his own man again; he thought lazily of Rockville, where they would give the show next week, of its prospects and his friends and of how one of them had got an option on an armadillo for him; he whistled a little to his eagle; once he turned on his side to scatter a cracker for the loping foraging rabbits; he breathed in with joy the mingled odours of the sand and sawdust and tan-bark; he was soothed by the silent company of the myriad quiet living things which were his care and his livelihood. Miller was gone some time, for it was difficult to get waited on in the crush. Bye-and-bye Brainerd rose and went to the opening of the tent and stood there leaning on the ticket-box, or rather cash-

box, and smoking; he could see a good stretch of the bright, shady grounds and it pleased him to watch the gaily-dressed groups, the busy, idle crowd. The stream was now well set for the concert; his eyes wandered among its myriad shades of colour, among the glancing beams struck out by the sun from the ornaments of young fashion, from the puffings and plumings of women's hair; to his ear idle coquetries of the breeze flung over the heads of the multitude snatches from the distant bands, bubbles of stray tunes floated near among leaves and branches, green shadows, pools of light. When Brainerd looked toward the theatre the first thing he noticed was a lonely figure sitting on a boulder by the road.

It was the same man he had noticed by the gate and his fancy was attracted to him now as then by a note of something lively and desperate in his quiet figure. For the strange man was rousing from his knock-down blow; while Brainerd was still watching him he himself began to watch the people as they mounted the theatre steps, and presently he got resolutely up and crossed to the lobby, where he stood alert. When there was a little pause in the procession he went over to the box-office and Brainerd could see that he was getting angry as he talked there; but then everybody who does not thrive on snubs gets almost as angry at a box-office as at the desk of a hotel; this man stuck it out, however, kept paying people waiting, smiled, at first sarcastically and then with genuine fun, took off his shabby hat with a flourish of mock gratitude and came down the steps again, growing moodier as he came. Brainerd supposed that he had been asking for a pass and was surprised

to find himself sympathizing with him, for to expect a pass on a holiday is shamelessly unprofessional. Brainerd did not know just why or when he had become aware of the man's being an actor; first he was not thinking of it and then he did not doubt it. The man strolled to the prairie-dog's enclosure with a lighter step than hitherto, as though any altercation, even at a box-office, was enough to buoy him up, and he stood regarding the little figures with a brotherly intelligence and sensibility that warmed the heart of the snake-tamer accustomed to the gaping emptiness of silly wonder. But Brainerd's attention, as he still stood smoking on his threshold, drifted once more to the strong current of the crowd; when Miller came back he sent him away again to take charge of their little booth of snake-skins which Miller's wife had been tending. She ought to have a while off, Brainerd said; nobody was likely to come in here till the concert was over—no, he didn't want any lunch, he'd had something just before he left town. After Miller had gone he went inside and looked at the Gila Monster again, and felt it softly as before. It was still horribly sick-looking and hatefully blown and puffed. "Durn him!" said Brainerd sympathetically to the reptile, in reference to the antipathy of Mr. Miller, and dropping the sufferer into his pocket he went behind the tent, where there was a chest and an oil-stove, and with his one hand poured some milk into a pan and began to warm it. "I think a lot of Miller," he said to himself, "but a man that feels that way about a business, what made him come into it?—here." A sucking gurgle of infinite satisfaction rewarded him as the Monster came in contact with the milk. When the

last drop was gone he once more carelessly spilled the Monster into his pocket and lit another pipe. When he got out to the front of the tent and lifted his eyes again from the kindling tobacco he found that they were looking into the bright dark eyes of the strange actor.

Neither of the men moved. Then Brainerd nodded shortly and smiled. The other man nodded, too. Their grace was that of a couple of awkward little strange boys, but behind this was the ease, the assurance of grown vagabonds. Presently Brainerd took the Monster out of his pocket and set it on top of the cash-box just as if it had been a prize ally or a dead rat or any of the illustrious seductions of boyhood. The newcomer became rigid with revolt and interest. "God!" said he, "it looks bored."

"It's sick."

"What do you call it?"

"It's a Gila Monster." This was said with the excessive indifference of great pride.

The stranger whistled, so he must have had some acquaintance with western legend. He came a cautious step nearer and looked at the reptile with dazzled curiosity.

"Don't touch it!" Brainerd warned him sharply. "It's dangerous."

"It's filthy."

"It's nothing of the sort!" retorted the showman after a shocked glance of concern.

The strange man smiled and when he did that his face was lighted with the most extraordinary life and sweetness. "I meant it looks rotten," he explained in all fellowship and examining it again. "Very queer

gentry!" he concluded. "You touch it yourself though."

"It's my business to—well, yes, I do kind of like the little buster, I'm so used to him."

Conversation lapsed again until Brainerd volunteered: "It's a great day all right."

"Oh, the weather'll do." He added without enthusiasm: "The summer's pretty much always like this out here—once it gets settled."

Brainerd studied him out of slanting eyes. He saw that the man's interest was easily roused and easily lost, that he suffered from the restlessness of an intense vitality condemned to inaction. Brainerd chose to recognize the friendliness, the susceptibility, and to pass over the lapses into self-absorption; he was touched and roused, without knowing why, by the man's voice, which was in reality the most expressive instrument he had ever heard. Now he saw that the man's poor clothes could hardly hold together and he believed more and more firmly that the man was hungry. He made another advance—"You like to see the show?"

The stranger looked up at him with a surprised, questioning flash and the showman confidentially added, "Not a soul in there."

"Thank you," said the stranger, comprehending now the whole extent of Brainerd's cordiality and making neither denial nor defense. He went past Brainerd into the tent and sank down on a bench in the quiet and the ruddy shadows; he stretched a weary arm along the back of the bench and put a hand over his face.

He was roused by his host's voice saying, "Here you are," and by a revivifying odour. "Water in it?"

He shook his head and his hand closed sharply round the glass; the rough, stinging whiskey plunged down his throat like molten strength, there came a glow through his starved blood which was like a triumphant answer to fatigue and poverty and disappointment. Yet he was weaker than Brainerd could have guessed; the drink, the shelter, the kindness produced an extraordinary relaxation in a spirit which had been screwed to too tense an independence, a self-sufficiency; Brainerd had a moment's terror that he would make some passionate gesture or that the mist which rose luminously in his eyes would brim over into tears. What he did say was, "That's good!"

Then afterwards, after the crackers and cheese that Brainerd managed to munch at too, and the milk requisitioned from the Gila Monster, over the glow of Brainerd's tobacco the stranger told about himself. He said he supposed Brainerd knew somehow or another that he was an actor and anybody could see he was out of work; his name was Herron, Dan Herron; he had come out west a lunger, but had got cured there; that had cost a good deal and as soon as he could he had gone with the first company he could get a birth in, so as to get east anyway—the company had been headed for San Francisco, but if you could make money in San Francisco it was as good a way to New York as any other; he didn't care what road he took so that it landed him on Broadway! Well, that company broke up before it ever saw the coast and it hadn't paid salaries; he got about just the same from one place to another; in these little towns you never knew when you might light on a ten-twenty-and-thirty and perhaps get

a week's work, and he'd recited, too, while his clothes held out—"Little Jim," "Ticket o' Leave," "The Coast Guard," yes, and even "Mandelay" and "The Raven," that they took to just as well as to the chromos —at fairs, at exhibitions and church entertainments, which when you came to think of it was rather rummy. Oh, he had got on! Still, he didn't deny that he was, as they used to say in this rich, present neighborhood, "strung on wires," and he had managed to get run down and to pick up the first drainage-fever that had been lying round up the state; that had kept him what you might call occupied ever since, though he could get a doctor's certificate, if necessary, that it was not the old lung racket. They had let him out of the hospital three weeks ago with six dollars and a half; he had started for New York on that, but you couldn't hire more than one automobile a minute with it and this was as far as he'd got. He'd paid out the last dime he had on earth to pass the gate here at Alderson's.

All this had come out casually between puffs of happy smoke, but he waited a minute, studying the doorway of the tent, while from the den to which it was relegated, the Gila Monster regarded him with a chilly eye, before he added that what he had counted on at Alderson's was finding a lot of his own people here—Wentworth and Sam Torrance and the whole crowd. What he had deeply hoped, of course, through all the tramp of getting there, was to find a job, but, failing that, at the worst they would, of course, have seen him through. He had made a point of getting there to catch them at the matinée, so that the calf would have time to be fatted and prepared for dinner; he had seen himself

presently scattering blessings on their heads from the platform of a Pullman going east. Well, man that is born of woman and so on—they had preferred going to Rockville and Silverton and Whip and Saddle Clubs, the devil take them, and missed their immortal chance! After he had risen to the company's being only laid off, not disbanded, he had fawned on the fresh lad in the box-office for their addresses, but that cherub would only say that they would all be back on Monday. He didn't mind telling his host that but for him, Brainerd, Monday would have found him a lantern-jawed corpse! Did Brainerd know of any boot-blacking or peanut-selling that he could get to do till that loafer of a Torrance turned up again?

Brainerd rose without answering and extricated a small lame rabbit from a newspaper in which it had lost its way. "They bring you these here for the snakes to eat and then you get fond of 'em and have to keep 'em and get *them* something to eat," he said complainingly to Herron. The young eagle sidling on its bench began to peck and fight at a tin cup and Brainerd filled the cup with water. He came back to his seat near Herron again, still carrying the rabbit which settled on his knees and began to wash its face, a distracting performance. Brainerd watched it from under slanting eyelids. "Keeping so many's kind of unbusiness-like, there's no getting round it—Why," he suddenly began, "the best thing you can do is to stay right here, Mr. Torrance'll be back for the evening concert sure, some of the others will be, too, and they always drop in to see the snakes. I'll want something to eat before long and if you don't mind you can take change here

while I'm gone—tell anybody comes in I'll be back soon and keep 'em for me and then when I get back you go get your own dinner." He spoke with complete matter-of-factness, striving to convey to Herron that there was nothing unusual in his entrusting his own and his partner's business to a strange man out of the street; he wanted no dinner but he meant to get out and settle Miller and to tell them at the Casino—not Poley's nor the Refreshment Pavillion, but the actual Casino—to charge up Herron's meal to him, he wanted to make sure of its being a good one. Even his impulsive kindness, however, was rather slapped by Herron's exclamation: "What! Leave me in charge of these heathen!"

"Only to tell people I'll be back."

"You don't expect me to handle them?"

"The snakes? No!"

Brainerd could not be but aware now that there might be drawbacks on the sympathetic side in his new friend, a concentration on the personal point of view as instinctive as a drowning creature's clutch, but not so pardonable; you might not have a very pleasant time if you stood in Mr. Herron's way, or if you asked him, with whatever generosity of intention, to stand for a moment outside of it himself. Yet, Brainerd thought, he didn't know when he had liked anyone so well, had such a strong kind of fellow-feeling, yes, and curiosity; he believed Herron's story, but he suspected something underneath it, and then suddenly he remembered something: the actor who had been going to marry old Packer's daughter! Herron—was that it? The papers had been full of their engagement and then had let it drop —quite a while back someone had told him that the

fellow hadn't behaved himself and old Packer had kicked him out, Herron—Herron—yes, he guessed that was the name. That would account for a good deal, all this hunt for work, all this hard-upness and for some thing about him besides that made you think he was naturally an extravagant kind of fellow, pretty quietly sure of himself, but nothing disagreeable, used to high living and a lot of style, the sort of natural high tone that you could imagine some of these foreign fellows having that had got knocked off their thrones, not that he talked that way. And Brainerd could not but wonder how on earth such a man had let himself be kicked out like this, how on earth he had come to take any chances and what for—a sick man that couldn't live out of that very climate, poor as a rat evidently, without any work, without any prospects, why a marriage like that would be just a providence to him! For what on earth had he risked it? How, with his greedy way of holding to his own notion, had they been able to cut loose from him? Not that Brainerd couldn't easily imagine his guest doing some devilish thing, only, why hadn't he been too smart to? just when laying low and holding on meant his life, very likely! "I wonder how they got rid of you?" he thought, in a twinkling of his shrewd eye which still did not take back any of its kindness. Glancing round the den he picked up their talk. "'Fraid of them?"

"Afraid of them!" Herron easily repeated. "You can lay to it I'm afraid of them. However, if you assure me that they can't get out—I'll be glad to stay," he said suddenly, humbly, in one of his soft and grave transitions.

"All right—Oh, there'll be a lady in very likely while I'm gone, one of the actresses, Miss Folsom, may be you know her?"

"I never met her, but I know who she is—she burst onto the stage about the time I first dropped off it."

"Well, she's going to star next year in a show where a snake bites her—she puts it on her, I understand, suicide or some such thing, and she comes in here and handles the little garters to get used to 'em. She said she might be in to-day during the intermission, she's at the concert!"

"All right, so long as she doesn't expect me to fetch 'em for her."

Brainerd's pride of craft was a little hurt. "Of course, a fly's dangerous to what they are!" he said. "I wouldn't let anybody lay a finger on a poisonous snake, unless he was a professional."

"Do professionals bear a charmed life?"

"Heh?—oh, well, it's different.—We're used to it, you know, and so are the snakes to us. Nine chances out of ten they don't bite and if they do, after your system's got used to it, you make for the whiskey or you give up a finger and it all comes out in the wash. If you haven't got that kind of system better get another job. Mostly, snakes know their friends." He surrounded himself with rolling smoke. Herron reached over and touched the drop of Brainerd's sleeve. "Louder than words," he said.

"Oh, that! that's an accident. Bound to have 'em in the best regulated business. This is the way it happened. A party came in one day (two women and a man—thirty cents worth, by George!) to see the show.

Of course you can imagine the gabble always goes on with jays about the snakes being kept on ice or their 'fangs extracted' and all that. I never can get used to it somehow, and mostly I carry a pencil round with me to jab their mouths and make 'em spit. But I'd been showing 'em a good deal that morning and I wanted to let 'em alone. I put up with all the little songs I could hear the man giving the two ladies till I took up the Gila Monster and then all in a minute, when he laughed and let out, 'Oh, you can't take us in! That thing's doped!' all the blood came up in my head. I couldn't find my pencil and 'Doped, is he?' I said, and stuck my finger clean into the Monster's mouth. He's such an easy old soak most of the time, very likely I wouldn't have thought of any trouble, even if I'd thought at all, but this was the time it made him mad. I ask you straight if it wouldn't have made you or anybody mad if you'd been in his place? Oh, he bit me all right. But you see he didn't do for me, quite, and here I am."

"The danger's all over?"

"Yes, I guess so."

"*Guess* so?"

"Why, they do say you can't be really sure till the six months are up. But I don't imagine it's going to kill me, after all's been done for me. It's not any way likely to."

"Well, you're a sport all right!" said Herron, a trifle palely.

"Rot! Anybody's a sport when it comes to business. How about doctors and soldiers and firemen and engineers and burglars? Don't they run risks? Did you

never hear of any accident happening in a factory or a mine, at a picnic or a church sociable or crossing the street? How are you going to steer clear of 'em? Do people sit home because trains smash and boats go down? No, you bet they don't, and I don't see but what women have children quite a few! And as for that six months, do you, say, or Mr. Sam Torrance or President Roosevelt, know what sort of way you'll be in six months from now? But you're not shedding any tears about it that I can see? All the talk there's been about me lately, it makes me sick! 'The hero of the day' one of the papers called me this morning, because I was advertised to handle the Gila Monster again. And what would I do, I'd like to know, if I didn't handle it? Sit still and squeal, make my life all over again, inside a safety appliance, and wish I was dead, sure enough! 'There must be a great fascination in it!' they say to you—fascination! ach, they're enough to turn your stomach!—unless there's a fascination in eating your breakfast or in a man riding down to his office in a trolley or doing any of the other things that are all in the day's work."

"Oh well, if that's the way you feel about it," said Herron, "you're lost. I congratulate you."

"Heh?"

"'A great fascination in it!'" Herron rose and stretched himself. He lounged over to the flap of the tent and stood there, gazing across the lawns, to the now empty lobby of the theatre. "A great fascination, yes, that's what they call it, the outsiders!"

"Oh here, shut up!" said Mr. Brainerd to a rattler. He lifted the snake a moment to pacify it and then

when he had looked at his watch he said he guessed he would go get his dinner; he went away, amused by Herron's frank reluctance to be left with the snakes. That gentleman, however, was one to be drawn rather than alienated by fear, and, once in privacy, he walked about the den, the cages, and stooped here and there to peer, to examine with a fidgety, boyish daring, "Not for me!" he said pleasantly, conversationally, to the reptiles.

Nothing, however, could hold him long but his own case. You could see the thought of that returning now as he strode up and down the tent in the bright restlessness of his dark eyes, in the re-tautening and keying up of that body, at once so virile and so frail, which only exhaustion could relax. It was but a thin and worn scabbard for the sword of so keen a spirit, the conjecture was very pertinent, under any but the softest, the stillest, the easiest conditions, how long it would last. Yet it was difficult not to believe that the robust life itself was independent of its dwelling. At length he dropped down on a stool behind the cages and sat there, his strong muscles still strung to rigidity, staring at a single spot of earth as if evolving from it some dear imperative, inexorable image—well might Brainerd marvel as to what could have parted him from his heart's desire!

And thus locked away from everything but his own mood he was unaware of approaching steps and rustlings, even had he noticed them he would have set them down to the anticipated Miss Folsom; he would never have suspected the fumbling, hesitating entrance of a man and a girl who appeared tentatively in the

doorway; he, looking about expectantly and with his expectation evidently confirmed by the presence of the snakes, leading the advance and she following, in a vague obedience, after him. The man was middle-aged or elderly and dressed in expensive common clothes; he was a thick-set, big creature with an excellent, though somewhat heavy jaw, and a bold forehead. The girl, beautiful as a statue and of something the same weight, moved forward with a dull and apathetic indifference so natural, so unconscious as to be a kind of grace; the overblown beauty of her face was as sweet as a heavy rose; under its weight of plumes, of azure velvet roses, her magnificent blond head sagged dispiritedly, her light blue finery, on which it would have been difficult to stick another rosette or flounce or beaded ornament, trailed limply on the dirt floor of the tent and swept its dust over the rhine-stone buckles of her large tan-colored pumps. She dragged a festooned parasol behind her.

"There's no one here," said the man. "But it's the place. There's a bench, my dear."

Herron lifted his head and his jaw dropped. He listened in a cold sweat of expectancy, but the girl did not speak.

Her companion added, "Do you feel better? This is a queer place. We ought to have gone to the Casino as I wanted. But you wait here for Miss Folsom and I'll go get you a glass of wine."

"Please don't get anything, papa," said the girl, and Herron's heart winced at the voice. "I couldn't go to the Casino, it's so crowded. That was what was the matter with the concert. I guess I'll be all right by

the time Miss Folsom comes. I'm glad she stayed till the intermission." She looked round her with a torpid, even an acquiescent distaste. "She says she likes to practice here."

Herron's eye measured all the distances of the tent, the possibilities of a seam in the walls, of a sudden retreating run, and found nothing. His back presently caught the eye of the girl's father, who, walking discontentedly about, had veered near the cages and then exclaimed, "Why hello!—" and at that Herron got to his feet and came quickly forward, confronting them; the girl, turning, was struck still again in the very act of recognizing him, with a little formless cry like that of some meek animal in pain.

Between these two there could immediately be no doubt of a poignant relation, of a past in which it was the man who had been wrong and the woman who had suffered, of a present in which he had the grace to feel a deepening shame, but in which she wished nothing but to forgive. The girl's face was painfully flushed, but a kind of light swam in its tears, the man looked sick though braced and ready, and a really remarkable nervousness and restiveness twitched in his mouth, in his lean fingers. Neither of them spoke. It was the father who stiffly raised his hat as if to indicate that here was an occasion for formality and nothing more. "Mr. Herron," he said in a chill salutation. "Come, Amelia."

Herron paid no attention to him, his eyes were glued to the girl's eyes. Her father laid her passive hand within his arm and tried to draw her away, but she stood her ground with a kind of stolid resistance and

now her face began to work and a little sobbing breath crept into her throat.

Herron's hand lifted itself and fell again, desperately, "Milly!" he said, "I—you don't—don't take her just yet. I want to tell her—" He paused, biting his lip.

"You can have nothing to say to Miss Packer, sir," retorted the father. "Come, Amel—" he too paused. The young woman, still inarticulate and still looking only at the young man, began fumbling at the breast of her dress, from which she presently drew forth a little embroidered silken case, and as she glanced at it her tears began to flow. An expression of the most intense annoyance darkened her father's face. "This is some property of yours, sir. I am sorry my daughter has had so little sense of dignity as to—to keep it —in that way. I urged her to give it to me when it first came.—We didn't, of course, know where to send it," he concluded with a sudden business-like probity.

Herron continued to look in the girl's face. Her large hands were working with the little case; it dropped on the ground and she held out a letter. "Is it for me, Milly?" he asked with a gentleness that seemed to put some other question.

"Yes," she replied in her inexperienced, unmodulated voice, "it's for you. It came five weeks ago. It's from that—New York. It's from one of your—theatre men."

At the same moment with her words Herron's eyes lighted on the little business stamp in one corner of the envelope and a most extraordinary change came over him. He went very pale, his shame, his reasonableness, his gentleness vanished at a stroke, a fathomless vitality flamed in his eyes and he snatched the message with

a complete indifference to the hand that held it. He threw away the envelope, the few lines of the letter seemed to set him on fire.

"Five weeks ago!" he said to himself. "Five weeks ago, good Lord!" He made a quick calculation, looking blankly at his companions. "And to-day—! Is there a telegraph office in the grounds?" he inquired of them, casting now a glance of savage eagerness into their faces.

"Yes," said the father quietly. "At the gate."

Herron ran from the tent. However, "Wait a moment," he flung over his shoulder as he went.

Except for the snakes, the rabbits, the white rats, the young eagle and the ghostly, pervasive, filtering sunlight that was almost a presence, Mr. Packer and his daughter were left alone. "Well, Mealy," said her father with unspeakable bitterness, "are you convinced *now?* Are you *satisfied* now,—now that you've shown that man that he's broken your heart, that you're just crazy about him and so wild to get him back that you've even got to carry his mail in—pfa! And he's shown you what you amount to to him beside a letter from one of his theatrical managers! You're not in it, that's plain enough for anybody I should think. I've got that to thank him for anyhow."

"It wasn't because it was his mail, papa," sobbed Amelia. "It was just all I had. All that was left—between us. I just had that. And now it's gone. I haven't got anything." The little embroidered bag which she had treasured on her bosom lay empty at her feet.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" demanded

her father. "What next? What is it you want? Don't simply stand there blubbering, for God's sake. Now that you've seen how much he thinks of you, can't you begin to haul yourself together? You've said all along you had to find him, to give him his letter. Well, now you've given him his letter. He's thanked you for it very politely, very gratefully, just like himself; he's got it and gone off with it and the thing's finished, it's over, it's done. Come on."

"Oh, papa, I can't go away. He said to wait a minute." They had both forgotten Miss Folsom. "He wants to speak to me, I want to see him again, papa!"

Her father stood still and regarded her with a rage of which the desperation silenced him. "Oh my God Almighty!" he broke out at last, "you want to see him again! What for? What for?—can't you answer me? To have him come back and find you waiting for him and put him to the trouble of having to tell you more clearly that he's through with you, thrown you over, that he don't want you, you can't have him, you're not good enough for him, he can't see where you come in!" At each phrase he shook her a little by the full and lovely wrists which in his pain and pity and outraged pride he had very sharply seized.

She held back a little, not stubbornly, but with a yielding whose laxity was so complete that it was effectually opposition. "Why, papa," she sniffed, "I can't go out in the street this way!" and he yielded to an argument out of his sphere, but which, with a coarse man's fine eye for the proprieties, he recognized as cogent.

Amelia, still weeping, fastened her dress and settled her hair and her hat; she opened her gold hand bag and took out her powderpuff; she made some brave and ineffectual dabs with it at her poor quivering face, under the coldly steady eyes of the Gila Monster and amid the continuous purr and rustle of the softly writhing snakes. Her father waited for her with an impatient patience. Before she had done a shadow was flung across the dusky light and Dan Herron came rapidly into the tent.

"Is Brainerd here," he said at once.

"Who?"

"No, I see he isn't. I can't find him." He turned round on the older man. "Mr. Packer, I've got to ask you to lend me eighty cents. The man won't send my telegram collect."

"What's that to me, sir?" Mr. Packer responded.

Herron turned without the slightest hesitation to the girl. "Have you got it?"

"Oh, Dan," she broke out, "what are you going to do with it? And eighty cents! Haven't you got eighty cents, Dan? Why, what can you have been doing and what's the matter? How have you been getting on if you haven't got even eighty cents? Oh, you're not—not suffering, are you, Dan? Not in want?" She kept coming closer to him and at something she saw in the stillness of his face she cast herself with a soft wail upon his breast. He put his arms around her as if he were glad to have her there in his clasp, but there was, nevertheless, a faint suggestion of preoccupied haste in his manner, which was in strong

contrast to his abashed deference before he had received his letter. "No, no, I'm all right. I just want to send a telegram, that's all, Milly, don't cry."

"Well, but I don't know what it's all about, nor what you're trying to do with the telegram; I'm afraid it's something about your going back on the stage and I don't want you to do that, I want you to stay here with me—"

"Amelia!" cried her father.

"Well, but I do, papa, why you know very well I do! And besides, look how thin and poor he looks and what horrid clothes he's got on, my darling! Why can't you make it all up with us and come with us and have everything you want and be comfortable and happy like you were—you know you were, you used to tell me so! And you do love me, I know you do!"

"Yes, I do love you, Milly," said the young man, and he regarded the proud radiance of triumph which she cast upon her father with a tenderness which did not prevent him from adding: "Will you give me that eighty cents?"

"Oh, but I can't give it to you if it's to go back on the stage with!"

"All right, then. I must find somebody who will."

She cried out and her father began to tear her from Herron's neck, who relinquished her with a kind of fond haste and another kiss.

"Come, come, Mealy!" Mr. Packer urged.

"Oh no! oh wait!" his daughter cried, "maybe I will. What was in the letter?"

"It's an offer," said Herron, pausing. "An offer of an engagement—to me, that they thought out of the

running, and yet they take the chance. They haven't forgotten me, there, in all this while. There's a friend of mine in the office, Ted Chesney—but you don't know him—and he wrote on the chance as I say even of my getting the letter and he says he'll hold the part open for me up to this very day, to-day, do you see, that you've brought me the news. If I don't let him know for certain to-day he'll have to give it to some one else, I'll have lost my chance, it'll be gone, out of my hand. If I telegraph him that I'll play the part they'll be glad enough to send me my fare home. He says, do you see, that it's a part made for me and he knows me, but maybe that's not so, maybe that's just talk and the part's nothing; it's a new firm, and a new piece, maybe it won't last, but no matter, it's a chance, an opening, it'll take me home to the east, to Broadway, to God's country, it's work, it's my work—Oh, my God, my girl, how can you stand there and pretend to love me, and not help me!"

The girl was visibly shaken. "And you'll be a great success?"

"Very likely."

"Why, I thought you were sure you'd be!"

"Oh, what does it matter?—Well, yes, then, Milly, I mean to be."

"And you'd be perfectly happy?"

"I'd be—satisfied."

"But if you got sick again, away off there all alone and couldn't take those hateful parts?"

"Ah, at least, I'd be there, there with the others, in the thick of it, I'd be at home."

"At home?"

"'Where the watchful bugles play!'" He stood looking at her, through her, beyond her, in a fondness and a detachment equally cruel, and standing so, he softly, raptly, fiercely quoted, "If I shall never have been remarked upon a breach at the head of the army, at least I shall have lost my teeth on the camp bread!"

"I don't understand you," said poor Milly.

"To be sure! but trust me, trust me!"

She wrung together the fingers that were heavy and agleam with jewels and he took them into his hard, thin hand. "Once for all, Milly, if you love me, trust me. That work there's what I need, what I must have. It's all I want, it's all that makes me worth while or that I am. Will you give it to me?"

The girl with her eyes fallen to his breast said presently in a half whisper, "But I can't, anyhow. The doctor says you'll—die, dear, if you go east."

"Die! die!" cried he with a great impatient change. "What of it? I'll die if I don't! I've died here every hour for two years."

"Oh!" she cried in outraged tenderness and put her hands over her face.

"You ungrateful hound!" cried Mr. Packer. "How dare you say such a thing to my daughter? What do you mean by breaking her heart and then insulting her? I picked you out of the gutter because she took a fancy to you, I bought you for her—yes, and with your consent, I notice!—just as I would buy any other cursed thing she took a fancy to. You lived in my house for over a year on the fat of the land, better than my own son, and you repaid me by sneaking away

like a thief, like a damn thief! How dare you turn on her now? What do you mean by it?"

"How dare you trust her to a husband that you could buy?" retorted the young man. "How dare you make such degrading, such impossible conditions to her engagement? Give up the stage—! Why, what was there left of me then for her to care for? Oh! I know I've wronged her, you can't tell me that! But if you see me stricken by meeting her and ashamed to face her, it's not because I had the decency to run away from her, it's because I ever came into her presence, was cad enough to claim her society, her sweet goodness on such slavish terms—they dishonor her too! Your daughter's husband ought to be a man, not a nice oily piece of your machinery. Why didn't you like me better when I came to you and told you that I couldn't abide by our agreement, that I had to live my own kind of a life by my own kind of a trade, why didn't you see that it was then that I was worthy of her? It's you that insult Amelia when you try to bind her to a man without work, it's you that have made her unhappy!"

"Amelia," said the older man, "is this what you believe too? What do you mean, either of you? What do you blame me for? I didn't want my daughter to marry an actor and I took you and gave you a place in my business, put you over the heads of better men than you, put you in the way of making more money than you'd ever dreamed of, made a man of you. Do you reproach me with that? I didn't want her to marry a consumptive and I got you the best doctors and the best living and the best exercise money could buy and

kept you out here in God's good open air and put some blood into you and gave you a constitution and maybe cured you. Is that what you reproach me with? No, I'll tell you what it is—it's the low company I took you away from, it's the drinking and carousing and the loafers you belong with that you want to get back to, the lazy, idle, drunken, irresponsible life that had made a wreck of you before you came out here—oh, I know what actors are, I know your kind! It's the decency and regularity and discipline and the hard work you're running away from—'work' you say you want, didn't I give you plenty of it? Did I ever take any of it away from you except the silly monkey-shines you happen to like?—Come, what's your idea in all this to-day? What do you want? Do you think there's something else you can get out of me now?

"Well," said Herron, "lend me that eighty cents and you shall be stark clear of me on the instant.—Heaven and earth!" he burst out, "did you think it was for your stupid money, for your great ugly house and its horrible society that I wanted her? I put up with them because I loved her and for no other reason. I was tired out, it's true, and empty of every kind of hope, and longing for something to hold to and so you were able to buy me, I was able to deceive myself for a little with your ideas. But—look at me. Do I look like a man that's chosen luxury? I look like a beggar, and I am a beggar, I haven't a cent for a bed to-night nor a meal and I don't care, I'm happy; I've tramped on foot for weeks without money, if you've any notion what that means, creeping a little bit nearer and nearer to the east, and I'll walk there, maybe, but I'll get

there—oh, I'll get there all right," he cried with a sudden change of tone. "I'll get back to the stage again, Milly, be sure of that, and the question is only whether I do it with your help or without. Listen to me. When I left you without seeing you, without asking you to stand by me or giving you any choice, I did you a grave wrong. Well, now then, let me make it up to you. We've another chance, choose. Will you marry me?"

The girl gave a shocked, strangling cry and swayed a little; the father's remonstrance allowed itself to be outfaced by the passion of grim quiet in the young man. "Will you come with me?" Herron continued. "You tried to impose your life on me and now I should have to impose mine. If I get this part I shall have money enough to look out for you, if not—I'll do all I can, Milly; I love you, I want you, I'll try to make you happy. You shall have every thing that I can get you and the chances are that I can get a good deal. But the stage I stick to. It's for life. Will you risk it?"

There was a long, unhappy pause. The girl was leaning against her father with his arm around her waist and her face hidden in her own arms which she had folded on his shoulder. Out of the sobs with which she shook, certain gasping words became audible. "Oh! Oh! Oh! what shall I do? Oh, papa, don't you think I could? Don't you think maybe it will be all right, papa? If he had me there to look after him and everything and keep him from getting sick? And you'd give us plenty of money, wouldn't you, and all, papa?"

"Not a dollar, Amelia," said her father.

"Oh, papa! oh! oh! not when it would make me so happy?"

"It wouldn't make you happy, my dear. Oh, Amelia, Amelia Packer, I think you must be crazy. Why can't you see, you poor silly girl, that that's just what this fellow's counting on. He thinks if he can get you east that I'll never let you want and that he'll have his own way and he'll have you and the money too. He'd be able to neglect you and spend your money on other women without anybody's interfering with him and, even if you left him after he'd broken your heart, and came home to me, you'd never have the same spirit about anything, and there'd be children and all to give him a hold on you, sickly children very likely, that you'd always be watching and dreading for him to crop out in; he'd always have some way of getting money out of us till he'd drunk himself to death on it. Why, you've got enough good jewelry on you to take you east and keep you in clover till he's had quite a fling; do you think he doesn't see it!—But no, sir," said the older man looking now into the younger's face across his daughter's heaving shoulders, "let him be careful how he tries to take you away from me, for I warn him if he does he'll have to keep you. The worse he treats you and the more you have to starve and suffer the quicker it'll cure you and the better I shall like it. Then when I take you back it'll be on my own terms. Not one cent of mine will ever go to keep you together and I guess he knows whether he can believe me."

"Well, Milly?" said the young man.

"Oh, but, papa, how can I—I love him so, I love him so, what can I do? I'm so unhappy, if you only knew

how unhappy I am, papa! I can't bear it. I'll just die too. Isn't there some way that you can fix it, papa? *some* way—isn't there?"

"Mr. Herron," said Mr. Packer at length, and the convulsions of soul through which his daughter was dragging him writhed pitiably in his strong eyes, "you've made a fool of my poor child and she makes a fool of me. She thinks she can't do without you and I'll make you one more proposition. It's my belief and hope that you won't take it, but I want this girl to see what she's worth to the two of us. Now then, she won't marry you, of course, unless you stay with us, where your health's good, but you needn't have anything to do with my business, you needn't do anything at all unless you want to. You two can have a house of your own, since mine's so distasteful to you, and built in any new-fangled way you fancy; I don't say I'd keep you tied down here altogether; you could go away—in reason; you could travel a winter in Europe, any of those southern parts, mind you, that would agree with you. If you like I could buy you a newspaper out here, or anything o' that kind that you've a taste for. You should have an income besides, of course; say—" and he named a surprising figure, "for you and my daughter to make a good appearance on. So there's your case—there's your precious health and there's what's a fortune to you and good work if you want it and there's the girl you claim you love, against this tomfoolery of yours. What do you say?"

The actor breathed a quick, impatient sigh and turned away.

It was at this moment that Clara Louise Folsom swept

into the tent. Herron turned to her without a pause, "I beg your pardon, madam," he said, "will you be so good as to lend me eighty cents?"

"Oh, don't do it!" Amelia cried in a fresh burst of tears, "it'll kill him!"

Poor Miss Folsom was naturally embarrassed, "Mr. Herron?" she inquired, to gain time.

"Ah, if you know me, so much the better! You're a professional, perhaps? I want—"

"He wants to go east and die," Amelia interrupted. "He'd rather do that than stay here with us, he thinks papa's so mean to him. He wants to go back onto that terrible stage that's almost killed him already, where all those horrid, pretty women are!"

"Please don't look at me like that, Mr. Herron," Miss Folsom smilingly temporized. "If we were alone I believe you'd snatch my purse."

"Ah, if I had the chance!"

"Oh! he's not particular," Mr. Packer contributed.

"Particular! Of course I'm not particular! What do I care how I get it so long as I get it?"

"But about going east, Mr. Herron, if your best friends—"

"I'm no friend of his," said Mr. Packer; "I don't give it to him, because I'm going to take my daughter to Europe to-morrow and I don't want him hanging around in New York and working on her sympathies the very day we go and the first thing we get back. Let him eat his heart out here, like he's left her to do for months."

"Oh!" Herron cried to Miss Folsom in an agony, "oh, be quick! It's four o'clock already!"

Amelia Packer suddenly ceased her tears and laid her hand with a deep look of sense and majesty upon Miss Folsom's arm. "If you do," she said, "and he dies, you'll be responsible. Now you choose."

"I can't take such a responsibility," Miss Folsom said decisively to Herron.

His face went a most dreadful white and he stood gaping at her, with his breast rising and falling in long breaths; then he shook off once more the disappointment, the despair, and started for the doorway.

"Oh, thank you, Miss Folsom!" Amelia cried. "Oh, God bless—"

"Folsom!" Herron paused to cry with a profound bitterness of amusement and relief. "Oh, an amateur!" and as he turned again, Brainerd, with his good hand in his pocket, made his leisurely and unheroic entrance.

"I heard the last of it out by the ticket-box," he said; "I'll lend you the money!" He pulled out a dollar and handed it to Herron, who sped without a word.

"I suppose you know," Miss Folsom said to him severely, "that that was a case of life and death."

"Oh, I guess so," Brainerd replied.

Late that night, after the evening concert, Sammy Torrance's party was once more seated about a table at Poley's. Miss Folsom, weary of Amelia's lamentations, had attached herself to them and the group was now behind the blue curtain drinking beer. Little Miss Waters was drinking it too. How could poor Mr. Torrance prevent her?—after all, it wasn't as if her people weren't in the business.

They had sat late and they were alone in the little

room where the lamplight lay soft on the plank walls, a bare little room, coolly redolent of new wood and wild flowers and the delicate still freshness of the night. Through the open window at their side, the tender radiance of moonlit fields seemed to breathe and bloom in sweetness; now and then its whiteness was obscured by a friendly policeman who had no ideas about licenses and who leaned in to pass the time of night, with his hands still full of the clover that his horse, thrusting in its own noble head, ate over his shoulder.

"I don't see how you can agree with that snake-man," Miss Folsom was saying to Torrance and Donnelly and little Miss Waters. "I don't see how under the circumstances you could want him to go east."

"But he had a job!" they chorused at her in amazement. "He had a job!" and they regarded each other, she and they, with bewildered eyes.

Brainerd came in, paused for a moment at their table, conversed in passing with the policeman's horse, and dropped into a seat across the room. As he gave his order he took something out of his pocket and set it on the table, holding it there with his good hand. It was the Gila Monster. "And some milk," he added to Joe Poley, "warm."

Those at the other table continued talking about Herron, and Donnelly instanced it as particularly felicitous that Sam Torrance had returned in time to send him east at once, so that he should not start out in debt to the new management. The horse crunched a lump of sugar from little Miss Waters' hand; she and the policeman exchanged gratified smiles. Torrance

looked at his watch. "Well," he said, "he's three hours nearer to New York." And with that there came a little hush upon the company. It was as if something stirring, imminent, vital had been said. "The shadow of an eagle passed" over the lamplit room. They became dimly more aware of their smallness in the wonderful still night, they saw in imagination the train speeding alone over the great prairies like a courageous human thing bent on its own ends amid that cool immortal majesty of moon and darkness. Far at the other end of its road they saw the monstrous garish huddle of the old town, its cruel, sordid, grinding ugliness gleaming with coloured lights, torn with infernal noises, stained with dust, with sweat, reeking with heat and shaking with effort, with fear and greed. It was really there, as actual as the peace and beauty that seemed now to breathe its consolation to them from the fields shimmering and silvering in the light, sweet air. In the blessing of that difference there seemed to be summed up all their happy weeks, all their gay, friendly leisure, here in this young country which was so spacious and so bright. "He's three hours nearer to Broadway," Torrance repeated, and then Fred Donnelly said, "Lucky dog!"

"What!" cried Miss Folsom, torn from contemplating all the time during which she was drawing pay for doing nothing. She saw Torrance and little Miss Waters looking quickly into Donnelly's face with the eyes of kindred and she gave a puzzled laugh. She added, "I can't understand you!"

They brought Brainerd his supper and the milk.

"Did you earn it?" he asked. He read and then passed it to a server. "Here," he said and gave it to the Gin Master.

THE END